

Lesson 1 – A Father’s Good Advice

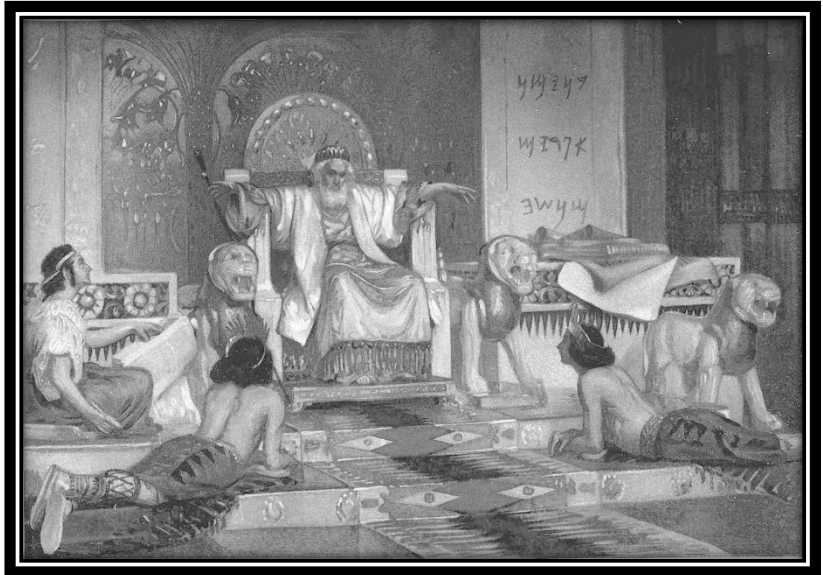
READING: Proverbs 1-3

How important is good advice? There does not seem to be a shortage of advice in our world. Everyone has an opinion on what the best way to do anything under the sun. But does that mean it is good advice? Indeed, it is a reasonable conclusion that if everyone is giving advice, most advice is not good.

What if we could find that rare nugget of good advice among all the bad; what would that be worth? To know when to buy the right stock, or what to invest in for our future? To find the right spouse, or the right profession? Of course, the issue is “how can we know”? Perhaps we might consider the character of the person giving advice.

3,000 years ago a man lived whom God said *“behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you”* (1 Kings 3:12). It was David’s son of peace, Solomon (whose name means “peace”) that God gave a unique wisdom. Of course, the irony of this great wisdom was that Solomon had wisdom, but did not apply it to his own life.

The first nine chapters of Proverbs are a particular discourse from Solomon as a father to a son. Whether it was literally to one of his many sons, or if it is more generic is uncertain. But the advice is applicable to any person who seeks to make good life choices.



1. Don't follow the wrong people.

In Proverbs 1:8-19 Solomon warns his sons to stay away from evil minded folks. There are a number of reasons we might associate with the wicked. Perhaps we are enticed by the

apparent joy the experience in their actions. Or, perhaps we might be tempted to believe that we can positively influence others. We say that we need to associate with them in order to change them, to fulfill the great commission. However, Scriptures warn us that this is a deception on our part; as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:33 when he said *"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'"*

Ironically, later Solomon's son Rehoboam would follow the bad advice of his companions to enact harsher laws on his kingdom, and this resulted in a rebellion where he lost most of the kingdom his father left to him (1 Kings 12). In the next chapter of Kings (1 Kings 13), we meet a young prophet of God who was told by another, older prophet of God to stay at his home for a meal. The problem: God had instructed the younger prophet not to stop until he returned. Thus the young prophet, by listening to the older prophet, lost his life.

2. Seek wisdom like wealth.

In Proverbs 2:1-21 Solomon described wisdom like wealth, and said to seek it. What does it mean to seek after something? For example, what do we do to seek after wealth? We do a lot to get wealth; we go to schools to learn trades to find professions. We might move to other parts of the country for better jobs. We might do our best to invest what we have to obtain more.

What would it be like if we sought wisdom as we sought wealth? What would happen if we applied ourselves to study for the sake of wisdom? What would happen if we pursued wealth in every opportunity around us? Ironically, people pursue wealth because they think it will lead to happiness, and it usually disappoints. But wisdom does not disappoint; it will lead to a more joy-filled life. Why not seek wisdom that way too? Wisdom will preserve you superior to wealth.

3. Have faith and trust in God.

In Proverbs 3:1-10 Solomon told his son to trust in the Lord and not in himself. Why is it that men are so willing to trust in themselves? They know they are flawed, and that they have erred time after time. Yet most people would rather trust themselves rather than God. They would rather act on their own desires and mind than the revealed mind of God.

Consider for example the design of the church. The New Testament is a pattern of the church that Jesus died to build. How many times have men added to it or taken away from it because they thought that they know better than God? They knew more about God in regards to the plan of salvation, or to the worship of the church, or to the work of the church. Did it work? The results of such thinking are denominations and divisions.

Consider for example the design for marriage. In Ephesians 5 Paul stated that the design for marriage is for a husband to live his wife as Christ loved the church. HE tells us that the wife is to submit to the husband as the church submits to Christ. This is not an overcomplicated idea, so it is not difficult to understand. But many people think that they know better than God. They believe that we should only love or submit to the degree that another person has earned it. The result is a failed marriage.

Solomon also said that his son should use blessings to grow faith. Too often we use our blessing to our own pleasure. James said in James 4:3 that *“you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions”*. We are blessed so many ways each day; are we using those blessings to grow our confidence in God? Do we see every meal as a fulfillment of God’s promise that we need not be anxious for what we eat or wear (Matthew 6:31), and therefore a reason to have even more faith in God?

Questions:

1. What are some of the reasons Christians give to associate with immoral people? Are Christians allowed to associate with immoral people at all (1 Corinthians 5:9-10)?
2. What are some of the ways a person can actively grow in wisdom? Does all wisdom come from age and experience?
3. What famed queen came from a great distance to seek wisdom? What did Jesus say she will do in Luke 11:31?
4. When someone says that the church needs to change to survive, how is this an example of not trusting in God?
5. The Lord’s discipline and chastisement is not often pleasant (Hebrews 12:11). How can we learn to love this?

Lesson 2 – A Father’s Good Advice

READING: Proverbs 3-8

A continuation of the principles of a wise father’s good advice. As we stated previously, the first nine chapters of Proverbs are a separate writing from the rest of the Proverbs. They are from Solomon writing as a father would give advice to a son. We have already considered the first three principles; now we continue with the last four principles.

4. Love the Lord’s Discipline.

In Proverbs 3:11-20 Solomon said that his son should love the Lord’s chastisement. It is not an easy piece of advice; particularly, because for many of us we believe ourselves beyond a place in life where we ought to be chastised. But the wise man knows that he will always benefit from God’s discipline. In Hebrews 12:5-11 the Hebrew writer says that God chastises us because he loves us. This might include things such as tribulation or disappointment in life that cause us to seek after God.

Bad things happen to good people. For many, this is a direct indictment of God. They declare "how can a just God permit suffering?" The Bible speaks to this at length, from the sufferings of Job for the purpose of testing to Paul’s thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians 12 that was given to grow his trust in the grace of Jesus. Bad things happen to good people; however, there is good that can be found in those things (James 1:2-4). But that good is found not in our observation, but by faith. We may never discern what good is brought about by our suffering, but we walk by faith, not by sight.

5. Trust in the knowledge of the Lord.

Solomon told his sons in Proverbs 3:21- 4:27 not to trust their emotions or instincts. Ask the average person on the street what they think “spiritual” means, and they will end up describing a feeling or an emotion. They may say that they attended a spiritual event or worship, and what they mean is that their emotions were provoked. Many people make a case for divine authority from the seat of emotion; they may argue that the church is obligated to certain works based on emotion, or that salvation come based on an emotion. They are willing to defend their emotions to the detriment of the mind of God in Scriptures.

Are emotions a wise thing to trust? Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 17:9 that *“the heart is deceitful above all things”*. What does that mean? It means that we will believe just about anything our emotions tell us, if we are willing to listen. Our emotions are not evil, but have no basis in wisdom. Scriptures would have us take control of our emotions and rule them, as God told Cain in Genesis 4:7.

6. Do not be lazy.

Solomon told his sons in Proverbs 6:1-11 that work is necessary. This truth was revealed in Genesis 3, when God cursed the ground and said that from now on, Adam and his descendants would work to live. Our world seems to think that the ultimate measure of success is to avoid work. The rich man in Luke 12:15-21 reflects this idea; In that parable, when the rich man saw his fortune, his thinking was to avoid working for the rest of his life. He said "*soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.*" God called him a fool, and took his life the day he said it.

In the New Testament this piece of wisdom has become a teaching of the church. Paul commanded the Ephesians "*let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need*" (Ephesians 4:28). HE also commanded that the Thessalonians were to put out of their membership anyone who did not work for a living: "*For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat*" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Solomon condemned physical laziness, and we can add to that spiritual or moral laziness. Many people lack the spiritual self-control to grow their prayer life or their personal study life. They decline to work with the church in the work of the church, and hope to take a life of ease in Christ. But being a Christian means working towards spiritual maturity, so that we may "*not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15).

7. Keep yourself pure.

Perhaps the largest chunk of text is devoted to the idea of sexual purity. Particularly in Proverbs 5:1- Proverbs 7:27 Solomon tells his son not to associate with sexual immorality. It is not merely the issue of engaging in sexual immorality, but the association. Romans 1 points to those who give approval of sin as being guilty in the same manner.

There is a great deal spoken of in the New Testament on the virtue of sexual purity. Paul discusses it in I Corinthians 6, where he tells us that the sin of fornication has a particular impact on the believer. "*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body*" (1 Corinthians 6:18). Paul goes on to say that sexual immorality desecrates our body, which is the temple of God.

Questions:

1. What are some of the reasons Christians give to associate with immoral people? Are Christians allowed to associate with immoral people at all (1 Corinthians 5:9-10)?
2. What are some of the ways a person can actively grow in wisdom? Does all wisdom come from age and experience?
3. What famed queen came from a great distance to seek wisdom? What did Jesus say she will do in Luke 11:31?
4. When someone says that the church needs to change to survive, how is this an example of not trusting in God?
5. The Lord's discipline and chastisement is not often pleasant (Hebrews 12:11). How can we learn to love this?
6. Why are emotions such a dangerous guide?
7. What are some doctrinal problems that are defended with emotional arguments?
8. What is the church to do with someone who refuses to work?
9. Who is an example of someone in the Bible who literally fled sexual immorality? Who is (are) an example(s) of someone in the Bible who did not?
10. What are some of the sins associated with sexual immorality?

Lesson 3: The Call of Wisdom
READING: Proverbs 9, James 3:13 - 4:4



ⁱⁱProverbs 9 finishes the advice of a father to a son with an unusual literary tool: a comparison of two women. These two women are the personification of the things that all people must choose between: spirituality and worldliness. In this case, Solomon calls the first woman Wisdom, and the second woman is Folly. He then tells his son that the two women represent two choices which his son must now make. Both women call to the same people; it is the people's choice to which one they will turn.

The First Woman Wisdom

Wisdom has built a place for herself and those who come to her. She does not

invite just the wise to come, but even those without knowledge. Consider this in parallel to the call of Christ. Jesus says in Luke 5:32 *"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"*. Of course, we know that the Gospel is for all men (John 3:16, Titus 2:11); Jesus is not saying that there are some He does not want. Instead, He was saying that the righteous would not come to Him because they could not perceive their need. He would call Himself a physician; only one who realizes they are sick go to the doctor (Luke 5:31). So it is with Wisdom; only those who are not wise in their own eyes will heed her call (Proverbs 3:7, 12:15)

Wisdom offers rewards to those who seek after her. Fundamentally, this reward is life. She offers days that will be multiplied, and years to be added. Consider the promise made by Paul in Ephesians 6 to the child who honors his father and mother. *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth"* (Ephesians 6:1-3).

The Second Woman Folly

The first things we learn about Folly is that she is a loud (clamorous) woman. What is it about being loud that we associate with the absence of knowledge? It is true that

commercials target audiences at different volumes based on the level of education they are appealing to; consider the difference between an ad for a used car lot (where the announcer is shouting at you) and the ad for a luxury car (where the announcer is nearly whispering). It is not the loudness, but that loudness is a substitute for substance. When there is nothing really to be said, saying it loud still brings attention to the speaker.

Folly entices us by offering us pleasure without understanding or effort. She offers that thing which is secret and stolen (vs 17). Consider the enticement of Eve by Satan with the forbidden fruit. Satan offered Eve knowledge without effort. Folly sits in high place; that is to say, she seems to be revered by the town. Are not some of the greatest follies of our time highly esteemed? Evolution, sexual promiscuity, and denominationalism are all embraced by the world around us and in a fashion sit in the elevated seats in our society.

Folly has a secret; inside her home are the dead. Indeed, the path of Folly is death. Folly is the description of the fool, and the ultimate fate of the fool is death before God. This is important for the rest of the book, as the fool will play an important part in understanding the will of God.

These two women come again in a fashion in James 3:13-18 and 4:1-3. There James describes two types of wisdom: Worldly and Divine. He does not personify them as women as Solomon does, but it is clear that he means the same things. The wisdom of the world (called fleshly and demonic) appeals to the flesh. He says that it is a wisdom of the self; it seeks for itself. It causes bitter envy and dishonesty.

James then describes the wisdom from above (James 3:17). It is remarkable that he does not describe it in terms of the amount of knowledge it has, but how it behaves. It is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, and full of mercy. It seems very much like love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. This is no coincidence, since Peter says in 2 Peter 1:5-7 that the ultimate result of spiritual maturity is love. There is a Jewish proverb (not in Scripture) that sums this up nicely: "*The greatest wisdom of all is kindness*".

Questions

1. Wisdom and Folly are called (personified) women. Are there other virtues or things in Scripture which are personified as women?
2. Why does Jesus not call the righteous to Himself?

3. What are some of the rewards that come with wisdom?

4. How was Eve offered knowledge without work by Satan? Why was that enticing?

5. According to James 1:5, how do we obtain wisdom? According to James 4:3, why do we not receive it?

LESSON 4: The Fear of the Lord

READING: Proverbs 1:7, 8:13, 9:10, 10:27

What is the fear of the Lord? The portion of Proverbs dealing with the admonition of a father to a son begins and ends with this statement (Proverbs 1:7 and Proverbs 9:10) *"the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"*. What is the fear of the Lord? It is precisely defined in Proverbs 8:13 which says *"the fear of the LORD is to hate evil"* (compare this to Job 28:28).

What is the value of the fear of the Lord? In Proverb 10:27 we are told that *"the fear of the LORD prolongs life"*. We are told in Proverbs 14:26 that the fear of the Lord contains our confidence. Ultimately, the reward of the fear of the Lord is riches, honor and life (Proverbs 22:4).

The fear of the Lord is not merely an Old Testament characteristic from a time when God's wrath seemed more likely to be manifested. Indeed, we are told today that God's wrath is not less, but greater; however, instead of being manifested in this life, it is manifested in the next. We see all of this in Hebrews 10:28-29, which says *"anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?"*

It is sometimes hard for us as New Testament Christians to understand the concept of the fear of the Lord, when we also preach and teach that we should have no fear of God as members of the body of Christ. Paul tells us in Romans that we have put fear away in our adoption by grace: *"For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'"* (Romans 8:15). But we are also told that the fear of the Lord is still part of the Christian life (consider Acts 2:42-43).

So how can we reconcile these ideas? Perhaps we need to understand why we should have a fear of the Lord, and what such a virtue means.

1. We Should Fear the Lord Because God is Not a Man - Numbers 23:19

Because God is not a man, who can we reason with Him for mercy? On what grounds can someone plead with God, if God does not share the common ground of being a man? Job points to this conundrum in (Job 9:14-15)? There is no common ground to begin with, leaving us to be without hope if we need to plea for mercy.

2. We Should Fear the Lord Because God is a Jealous God - Exodus 20:5

God made it clear that His jealous nature will not permit our faithlessness. The prophet Nahum says this in Nahum 1:2: *“God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies”*. The wrath of God is earned when we do not give Him all things that He is entitled to. If we should put other things before Him, we are condemned. Even if we put ourselves in front of Him, we are at fault. God’s jealous nature is deadly to our failure to give him primacy in our lives.

3. We Should Fear the Lord Because God is a Just Judge - Psalm 7:11

We ought to be in fear of true justice. By this we mean a justice more true than we would expect in our world. In our world, people often are dependent on the technicalities of law to be found innocent, or the mercy of the court to receive leniency. But what if the judge was perfect? What if all that was measured was whether the law was broken or not? What if every time you went over the speed limit, even for a brief second, you received the maximum fine instantly? And what if penalty of that transgression was death? This is what it means to fall into the hands of a just God. We all have guilt (Romans 3:23), there is one penalty for our guilt (Romans 6:23) and God is absolutely just. Our only expectation is fiery wrath from a just God (Hebrews 10:27).

4. We Should Fear the Lord Because God Does Not Relent - Job 9:13

Job points out that another reason a man ought to have a fear of God is that God does not forget. That means, that unlike people, His anger does not lessen over time. A thousand years may pass, but God’s wrath does not change. In Amos 8:7 God promises NEVER to forget anything, and that includes sin. What would it be like to stand before one who does not forget even one thing you have done?

5. We Should Fear the Lord Because God Does Not Hear Sinners - John 9:31

When someone has sinned, they have become a transgressor, a sinner, and are bound in the condition of Sin. In Isaiah 59:1-2, Isaiah telling us that sin cuts us off from God. *“Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear”*. It is not that God does not hear us because He cannot, but because of His nature, He will not listen to us while captives of sin. If we are cut off from God, how could we even ask for mercy?

All of these points revolve around the idea of sin. Our fear of the Lord is indeed a fear too of the consequences of sin. It is not meant to drive us away from the Lord, but to consider Him in reverence and awe. Consider how we vie electricity. We need it for our lives, and

could not live without it. Yet to mishandle it or be careless with it is risking serious harm or death. It is sin that causes us to have a terror of God.

But it does not speak to our condition when we have sinned. Does the fear of the Lord mean that when we sin, we are without hope? These divine characteristics seem absolute. Yet we might consider that Jesus Christ resolves these fears for those who are in Him. By His coming (and His nature in coming) Jesus is the perfection (i.e. completion) of the fear of the Lord.

Questions

1. How does Jesus resolve our fear of the Lord because God is not a man (1 Timothy 3:16)?
2. How does Jesus resolve our fear of the Lord because God is a jealous God (Romans 3:25)?
3. How does Jesus resolve our fear of the Lord because God is a just judge (John 5:24)?
4. How does Jesus resolve our fear of the Lord because God does not forget (Hebrews 10:17-19)?
5. How does Jesus resolve our fear of the Lord because God does not hear sinners (John 16:23-26)?

LESSON 5: Seven Things God Hates

READING: Proverbs 6:16-19, Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23

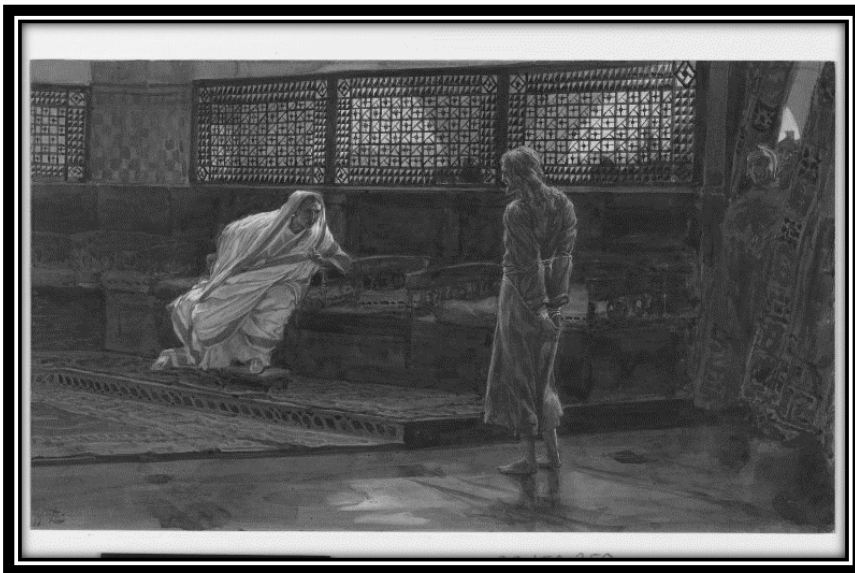
One of the interesting devices used in Proverbs is the number seven. Sometimes it is broken apart (such as 3 and 4 in Proverbs 30:15-29). In Proverbs 6:16, such a tool is used to describe something remarkable: seven things God hates.

Many people mistakenly believe that God is not capable of hate. They see that God is love (1 John 4:8), and that therefore He cannot hate. This is simply not true. The mistake is in believing that one cannot hate if they have love. But love and hate are not polar opposites

in Scripture; indeed, we might understand that they are sometimes companion ideas.

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These passages are not unique in speaking to the things God hates. He hated the vain worship of the Israelites in Isaiah 1:14 and Amos 5:21; He hated the worthless offerings of Israel in Isaiah 61:8; God hates



divorce (Malachi 2:16) and the abominable idolatry of Israel (Jeremiah 44:4).

But this list is different in that it is not a list brought on by a single action, but something that Solomon was saying about the nature of God. It is not one characteristic but seven, repeated in part in Zechariah 8:17. This is something that is different. Perhaps the difference is that these seven characteristics are mentioned in the New Testament as those characteristics of the ones who murdered Christ.

1. A Proud Look / Haughty Eyes

In Matthew 27:18 Pilate deduces that the Jews of the Sanhedrin have conspired to murder Jesus because of envy. This jealousy is described later against Jesus' disciples in Acts 5:17 and Acts 17:5. These men had been condemned for their vanity in Matthew 23, where Jesus pronounced a series of "woes" against them as hypocrites.

2. A Lying Tongue

It is interesting that deceitfulness is mentioned two times in this passage. The first is simply addressing the issue of lying. Jesus told the Jews that they did the deeds of their father the Devil, who is the father of lies (John 8:44). They distinctly lied to Pilate when they told him that Jesus had forbidden paying taxes to Caesar (Luke 23:2), when Jesus had stated to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's” in Matthew 22:21.

3. Hands That Shed Innocent Blood

Isaiah saw that the Messiah would be murdered without any guilt (Isaiah 53:5-8). That Jesus was innocent of the charges is clear; Judas declared it (*"I have sinned by betraying innocent blood"* Matthew 27:4) and Pilate declared it (*"I am innocent of the blood of this just Person"* Matthew 27:24). Thus the Jews were guilty of shedding innocent blood, as they declared when they responded to Pilate *"His blood shall be on us and on our children"* in Matthew 27:25.

4. A Heart That Devises Wicked Plans

Jesus death was the result not of convenience but of conspiracy. Scriptures reveal that the murder of Jesus had been on the mind of the Jews for some time (John 7:19 reveals that it was on their mind several years earlier). They began a conspiracy when Lazarus was raised from the dead (*"So from that day on they planned together to kill Him"* John 11:53) that required planning and scheming with Jesus own disciple Judas.

5. Feet That Run Quickly To Evil

In John 13:27 Jesus told Judas *"what you do, do quickly."* While the conspiracy was planned for some time, when the opportunity arrived, it only took a few hours to bring the elements of the crime together. Indeed, Scriptures reveal that the Jews intended to avoid killing Jesus during the feast (Mark 13:2). But when the time came, their feet were quick to rush to action.

6. A False Witness Who Utters Lies

The trial of Jesus was a mockery of justice. There were five trials total (Before Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, and twice before Pilate), where Jesus' guilt was never established, but instead he was passed from court to court. Pilate declared Him innocent three times. But the false witness provided by the Sanhedrin were ultimately effective. “Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward” (Matthew 26:59-60).

7. One Who Spreads Strife Among Brothers

No person in history has the definition of betrayal that Judas Iscariot has. Jesus said that Judas was the prophesied "*Son of Perdition*" in John 17:12. Perhaps there is sorrow or bitterness when Peter reminds the other apostles that Judas "*was counted among us and received his share in this ministry*" (Acts 1:17).

Questions

1. How can God love and hate? Does God hate people?
2. How might lying be different than bearing false witness?
3. The Jews were guilty of both devising wicked plans against Jesus and when the opportunity arose, running swiftly to act. In some ways these ideas are counter-intuitive (they plotted to murder, and then they acted when a chance came). How is it that this happened? Why would the Jews change their mind to kill Jesus during the Feast?
4. What do you make of the Jews calling for the blood of Jesus to be on them and their children (Matthew 27:25) and Peter using a similar phrase in Acts 2:39 ("*For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself*")?
5. What does "Son of Perdition" mean? Where else is it used in the Bible apart from referring to Judas in John 17:12?

LESSON 6: Those Whom God Calls a Fool
READING: Various

What is a Fool? We have already seen the woman whose name is Folly (foolishness). She was merely a creation to embody the mindset of worldliness. The word translated as fool in Hebrews is “*Keseel*”; literally it means “fat” but is a description of one who has no sense. Thus a fool is one who is likely to be fooled.

The Fool makes most of his Old Testament appearance in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (66 out of 69 times). His appearance in Psalm 14:1 and 53:1 is to identify him with the man who in his heart says “*there is no God*”. Since anyone can be deceived, anyone can take on the identity of the Fool.

Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.

Proverbs 10:18

To do evil is like sport to a fool, but a man of understanding has wisdom.

Proverbs 10:23

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.

Proverbs 12:15

A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident.

Proverbs 14:16

A fool despises his father's instruction, but he who receives correction is prudent.

Proverbs 15:5

Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly.

Proverbs 17:12

Why is there in the hand of a fool the purchase price of wisdom, since he has no heart for it?

Proverbs 17:16

Wisdom is in the sight of him who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.

Proverbs 17:24

A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.

Proverbs 18:2

A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for blows.

Proverbs 18:6

A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.

Proverbs 18:7

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.

Proverbs 19:1

He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered.

Proverbs 28:26

A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.

Proverbs 29:11

From these passages, what characteristics seem to dominate the behavior of a man God calls a Fool?

1. He cannot control his mouth. ^{iv}Whether it is slander (to speak evil of another), raging or venting his emotions, or has a perverse mouth, the Fool cannot bridle his tongue. We are warned in the New Testament of the dangers of the unbridled tongue. *“Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire”* (James 3:3-5). His mouth brings him reproach to the degree of violence.

2. He enjoys evil activities

Whether this refers to his desire for doing evil, or simply being part of the worldly crown, the Fool enjoys the works of the flesh. Since he lives for the flesh, it is no wonder his desires are wicked.

3. He has no mind for spiritual things

The Fool is occupied with the things of this world. *“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:4). He does not pursue wisdom (or its natural conclusion, righteousness) and does not esteem those who have it. God called the rich man a Fool in Luke 12:12 when he thought that he could retire to enjoy his wealth; his eyes were only on the things of this earth.

4. He believes himself right by his own heart

The Fool is characterized by that most common condition, being right in his own eyes. We have seen repeatedly in Proverbs that trusting in ourselves for understanding is folly, and that only by committing to God can one have truth. How many today are the Fool who believe that they are right before God merely because they feel it?

5. He refuses to receive correction

One of the most important characteristics of a Christian is that we are willing to be chastised. Whether it is God Himself (Hebrews 12:1-8) or the church (1 Thessalonians 5:14, 2 Thessalonians 3:15). The Fool is one who, when admonished, is angered or offended. Perhaps they even forsakes the church over their correction. This is the Fool, who rejects correction.

Questions

1. Jesus said that calling someone a fool put us in danger of Hell (Matthew 5:22). Does this mean we cannot identify someone as a fool based on these passages?
2. How can we learn to control our mouth?
3. What are some of the evidences that one is a Fool in regards to worldly living / lifestyles?
4. How easy is it to see ourselves as right in our own eyes (Proverbs 21:2)? How can we avoid coming into this condition?

5. What should we decide on as our reaction to being admonished by our brethren in Christ?

LESSON 7: Proverbs in Marriage

READING: Various, Proverbs 31

There are a number of practical living aspects dealt with in the Proverbs. How we work, how we do business, or raise our family are spoken of often in Proverbs. Marriage is also discussed at length in proverbs; specifically, the Proverbs discuss the values of a wife who is virtuous. Consider the following:

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth.

Proverbs 5:18

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is as rottenness in his bones.

Proverbs 12:4

It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

Proverbs 21:9

It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.

Proverbs 21:19

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD.

Proverbs 18:22

House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.

Proverbs 19:14

But perhaps the most compelling language in Proverbs is the marital advice given by a mother to her son in Chapter 31. The message is an oracle of the mother of King Lemuel (although some see this as a separate portion from the oracles of Lemuel's mother). There is no knowledge of who Lemuel is; some Jewish traditions identify him with Solomon, and some texts render him a king of Assyria.

Lemuel's mother desired that her son should be a righteous ruler, and without the right spouse, such could not be the case. Of the blessing a ruler might seek, an excellent wife would be the most important. Her value would be far above rubies.

Reading Proverbs 31:10-31, let us consider some of the qualities found in a partner in general that we can both seek to attain and to obtain:

1. Trustworthiness

Trust is of such great importance in marriage, that it leading the list is no coincidence. Trustworthiness has two attributes to consider: the willingness to trust, and the character of being worthy of trust. Too many marriages struggle because of the evidences of no trustworthiness; issues such as lust (pornography) or covetousness (financial irresponsibility) damage the worthiness of trust. On the other side is the inability to trust others that many feel. This too damages the marriage relationship.

2. Kindness

We note that this worthy woman is known for her good works. She is one who seeks to aid the impoverished. One of the more beautiful passages is verse 26, where we find that she is a pursuer of that highest wisdom, kindness. As seen in previous lessons, kindness is the chief virtue of wisdom. If we consider that we are to do unto others as we would have done to us, the wise person seeks what is best for others rather than themselves.

3. Diligence



Lemuel's mother describes this woman she seeks for her son as one who is hardworking. Several times in the passage it is pointed out that she is not afraid of work. Whether it is working apart from the home in trade, or ensuring that her family is provided for, she is on top of the situation. Too many people today are afraid of work. They conspire to be lazy or to find a free ride. In a marriage, someone who will not work is detrimental to the marriage covenant.

4. Praiseworthiness

Lemuel's mother now suggests that this woman ought to be praised. Acknowledgment of accomplishment is an important characteristic in a marriage relationship. In this case, it's clear that the wife has earned praise. The issue too many times is that we don't offer praise where

praise is due. Both her husband and children praise her; consider that this is the expectation that Lemuel puts on her son. If you find the right spouse, do not fail to let them know.

Marriage is important. The Scriptures reveal in the New Testament that we are held accountable before God for our conduct in our marriage. 1 Peter 3:7 tells us that God will not hear the prayers (a polite way of saying we are cut off from God) of a husband who does not dwell with his wife in understanding (*Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered*). Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands as though to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18); husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25, Colossians 3:19). The Proverbs on marriage are of double importance to the New Testament Christian.

Questions

1. Much of the marriage language in Proverbs is about wives. Why might this be, and how should we view this language?
2. What does it mean that a prudent wife (or husband) is from the Lord?
3. What type of person is a contentious person? Why is living with someone like this so difficult? How can we know if we are such a person?
4. What are some of the ways people demonstrate they are trustworthy? What are some ways they cause a lack of trust to be present?
5. Why is it so important that we bring praise where praise is due?

LESSON 8: Proverbs in Parenting

READING: Various

As with marriage, the Proverbs deal a great deal with parenting. The very first of the general proverbs (10:1) begin with language to the type of parent and child we ought to be. Again, this is Old Testament wisdom for a New Testament commandment. *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth”* (Ephesians 6:1-3).

When we survey the Proverbs that pertain to parenting, a core theme arises about discipline. Again, this is a New Testament concept, as mentioned by the Hebrews writer in Hebrews 12:7-10: *“It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness”*.

The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother. **Proverbs 10:1**

He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, [But] he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.

Proverbs 10:5

A wise son accepts his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

Proverbs 13:1

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

Proverbs 13:24

A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother.

Proverbs 15:20

A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully, and will share in the inheritance among brothers.

Proverbs 17:2

Grandchildren are the crown of old men, and the glory of sons is their fathers.

Proverbs 17:6

A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him.

Proverbs 17:25

A foolish son is destruction to his father, and the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping.

Proverbs 19:13

Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death.

Proverbs 19:18

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him

Proverbs 22:15

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6

1. Discipline

As we mentioned before, much of the language of the Proverbs on child rearing pertains to discipline. It sometimes specifies the use of the rod. We ought to consider this more of a cultural statement than a specific command (see lesson 12 on the language of the Proverbs). However, we should consider that the consistency of an emphasis on physical punishment cannot be ignored. This is also a suggestion that it is not just parents who have some obligation to discipline, but grandparents as well. It corresponds nicely to Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 5:4 where we are told that the obligation of care is not for parents only, but to grandparents as well.

2. Honor

^{vi}While less is directly said about this subject, it is inferred that the hope of discipline is to rear an honorable child. As we said earlier, the New Testament Christian is commanded to honor father and mother. But what is honor? Jesus taught on this in Matthew 15:4-6. There Jesus said that the command to honor father and mother was violated when the Pharisees chose not to take care of their parents. Thus, to honor them is to see to it that they are provided for in their advanced age. How many children today are at a point in life where they should be caring for their parents, but instead are the person being cared for? Consider Proverb 10:5 in this aspect.

3. Preparation

Although never directly stated, we ought to conclude that these Proverbs speak to the idea that it is the role of a parent to prepare their children to enter the world. We have a child for around two decades, then we return them to the Lord for His service. As Christians, we seek to instill in our children above all else the desire to seek God in life. But around this pursuit are a number of principles that need to be instilled: self-control, preparation for success, preparation for failure, and acceptance of admonishment.



The Proverbs teach that parents who make the hard decisions early on have a reward in the adults their children become when they are adults.

Questions

1. How does God discipline us?

2. How might a grandparent exert discipline or authority without usurping the authority of the parents? What are many grandparents guilty of when it comes to the discipline of their grandchildren as opposed to their children?

3. Is it a command to use a rod on a child? What must an acceptable form of discipline be about? What concerns do parents have today regarding disciplining their children?

4. How do we teach our children to honor us?

5. What does it mean to teach our children to “gather in summer”?

Part 9: Proverbs at Work

READING: Various, Proverb 24:30-34

Another aspect of our lives that the Proverbs deal with pertain to work. We have already seen that Solomon's advice to his son was to avoid laziness. However, there is a great deal more said on this subject throughout the Proverbs.

1. The warning against being lazy

The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.

Proverbs 15:19

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, and will not even bring it back to his mouth.

Proverbs 19:24

The sluggard does not plow after the autumn, so he begs during the harvest and has nothing.

Proverbs 20:4

The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, for his hands refuse to work;

Proverbs 21:25

The Proverbs use hard language to describe the person guilty of laziness. Proverbs 24:30-34 contain a rather dramatic vision of the life of a sluggard. It is apparent from their lives that they are their own worst enemy. There is a subtle suggestion in the last verse of that passage that the sluggard may ultimately resort to sinful means to survive because of their sloth.

2. The admonition to make wise decisions on work

Prepare your work outside, and make it ready for yourself in the field; afterwards, then, build your house.

Proverbs 24:27

This proverb really speaks to marriage, but provides a principle that is for our work as well. In this case, the point is that a man ought to prepare his means of living before he begins a family. But we will add to this the importance of making a wise decision in professions. Not all professions are equal. As a Christian, we need to consider that our

employment is merely a means to an end, to provide in our lives of service to Christ. Our vocation should not define us.

To this end, Christians need to enter professions that do not cause them to be unfit for service. Some careers require us to relocate to places where there are no faithful saints; thus we forsake the assembly of the saints and sin against God (Hebrews 10:25). Some careers offer a fraternal feeling that competes with the fellowship of the saints. Some professions expect us to work on Sunday, or long hours away from our family. It is not just laziness that we need to avoid in our work habits, but putting our work before our God.

3. Know your business

Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds; for riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations. When the hay is removed, and the tender grass shows itself, and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in, the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field; you shall have enough goats' milk for your food, for the food of your household, and the nourishment of your maidservants.

^{vii}**Proverbs 27:23-27**

Christians are commanded to work for our earthly masters as though we are working for God. Paul said “*slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will [d]render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free*” (Ephesians 6:5-8). We ought to see the modern application of this statement by substituting the word “employee” for slave”. Whatever we do, in word or in deed, we ought to do in the name of the Lord, as though unto the Lord Himself.

Knowing our business falls under this Christian commandment. We ought to be wise in our practices at work. This reflects to others the virtues of being in Christ, and renders them unable to say an evil word against us in the day of visitation.

4. Sin of dishonest work

Differing weights and differing measures, Both of them are abominable to the LORD.

Proverbs 20:10

Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD, And a false scale is not good.

Proverbs 20:23

The word “abomination” is not often used in the Scriptures, perhaps to give weight to the few times it is used. Idolatry is described as an abomination before God. Homosexuality is described as an abomination, as is human sacrifice. But many do not realize that cheating in business is an abomination before God.

Why would this sin rank up with the other “abominables”? Perhaps it is the secret nature of wronging another person; the dishonest scale is unknown to all but the cheater. Perhaps it is that the consequences of such behavior is to detrimental. Consider the implications to the community of a Christian who is known for being dishonest in his work. Perhaps it is the ultimately motivation; the love of money above the love of one another.

Questions

1. Is there a difference between being lazy and being unable to work?
2. How might being a sluggard be a doorway to other sins?
3. What are some professions that are outright sinful? What are professions that require us to be diligent to avoid forsaking the assembly. What professions are there where honesty is difficult? Where kindness is difficult?
4. Can you think of a circumstance where not knowing your business brings reproach to you or to Christ?
5. How does dishonest business practices bring reproach to Christ? Is there a difference between being shrewd in business and being dishonest (Luke 16:1-9)

LESSON 10: Proverbs for the church

READING: Various

We understand that the church of Christ began after Jesus arose from the grave, and was opened to men on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But we also understand that the nation of Israel was a foreshadow of the church. Paul said to the Corinthians “*now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*” (1 Corinthians 10:11). “These things” are a reference to the history of Israel; the congregation of Israel is an anti-type of the church. There is much we can learn from the Proverbs that pertain to issues face by the church of Christ.

1. The dangers of change

My son, fear the LORD and the king; do not associate with those who are given to change;
Proverbs 24:21

Do not move the ancient boundary which your fathers have set.
Proverbs 22:28

Do not move the ancient boundary, or go into the fields of the fatherless;
Proverbs 23:10

The Scriptures teach us that God does not change. We understand that the church that Jesus established would not change, as it would not even be overcome by death itself (Matthew 16:15-17). Yet today we live in a time where even brethren seek to change the church. Even without the complete understanding of doctrine we ought to remain aloof from anyone who suggests that there is a time for change.

2. The dangers of fear

The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.
Proverbs 29:25

A bad habit many Christians have is to be caught up in the fears the world has over various things. Whether it is politics, world affairs, the environment, or other such concerns, the Christian is not a part of such concerns. But too many times we get caught up in the fears of the world and act in a manner not befitting of Christ.

Sometimes brethren get caught up in the fear mongering of politics and sin by slandering our leaders. Sometimes we become obsessed with the fears of the world on issues like overpopulation and the environment and make unwise or sinful decisions over this. Sometimes we become hesitate to preach the gospel over the mere fear of persecution.

3. The dangers of worship without sanctification

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

Proverbs 15:8

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!

Proverbs 21:27

These two proverbs speak to the nature of acceptable sacrifices before God. Here we see that a man who is not in right behavior cannot please God with sacrifices. Too many think that they can live a life of debauchery or sin and then, by joining other Saints on Sunday, be forgiven by participation in worship. What they do not see is that their worship is an abomination to God. Even the sacrifices of our lives (Romans 12:1-2) are meaningless if we are wicked in our lives.

4. Church discipline

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, But he who hates reproof is stupid.

Proverbs 12:1

He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding.

Proverbs 15:32

Much has been said about discipline by parents. But the concepts of discipline are important to the church of Christ. There are numerous commandments given to the church to admonish those who are unruly (1 Thessalonians 5:14), to keep away from the unruly (2 Thessalonians 3:6), to remove the sinful brother from our assembly (1 Corinthians 5:4-5), and to reject the divisive brother after multiple admonitions (Titus 3:10). It is not just these ultimate acts that are part of church discipline; the work of the

evangelist is to reprove and rebuke (2 Timothy 4:2-3), and for the elders to oversee and shepherd the flock (1 Peter 5:1-5).

Particularly, Christians need to be people who can receive admonishment and benefit from it. This is, according to Proverbs, a characteristic of a person who is wise. The great trouble too many Christians have is that they are too easily offended, or too prideful to receive correction. As a son who rejects correction is foolish, so too is the brother in Christ who refuses to submit to the body of Christ.

Questions

1. What are some of the parallels between the kingdom of Israel and the church? How do we know that Israel is a foreshadow of the church, and that the church not just a substitution or subsequent part of God's plan (Ephesians 3:11)?
2. What is an example of a "change agent" in the Lord's church? What things have you seen in your lifetime that testify to the damage change brings?
3. How does worldly fear infect the church?
4. What are some of the sacrifices that a Christian offers today? How might a Christian be wicked?
5. How can we examine ourselves to ascertain if we are easy to receive discipline?

LESSON 11: The Dangers of Alcohol

READING: Proverbs 23:19-21, 29-35, Proverbs 31:4-7

In lesson seven we discussed Lemuel and the oracles of his mother. Most of us have some familiarity with the later part of the chapter and the worthy woman. But Lemuel's mother's first advice pertained to her son's self-control in matter of alcoholic drinking.

In the New Testament, we are warned in a number of passages on the dangers of drunkenness and various types of drinking. Paul says that drunkenness is a work of the flesh for which we while not be able to enter into heaven in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-21. Peter warns us not just of drunkenness but of social drinking and drinking as entertainment in 1 Peter 4:3 when he says "we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles--when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. A Christian who has their mind on Christ understands that drinking alcohol has no part of their life.

But our difficulty is that there is no statement in the Bible which states that alcohol is an unclean substance, and that any consumption is a sin. Why not? The answer is provided to us by Lemuel's mother. She says some important points we need to consider.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

Proverbs 31:4-7

1. It is not for kings to drink wine or intoxicating drink

Lemuel's mother is making it clear that a man who has a mind towards spiritual things cannot drink alcohol (of any type, per her admonition). We understand that she is saying that he needs to be one who discerns the law and justice. This is similar to the Mosaic prohibition for priests to drink wine in Leviticus 9:9 (Ezekiel 44:1).

Today, we are called kings and priests of God (1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:6, 5:10). We offer worship and sacrifice before God with all of our life (Romans 12:1-2). This sobriety is more important now than ever (Hebrews 10:28-29). Drinking alcohol for social purposes or for "unwinding" represents a friendship with worldliness that brings us enmity from God (James 4:4).

2. Give strong drink to the perishing

If alcohol is so bad, why doesn't the Bible clearly say *"any drinking is sin"*? Paul actually says in Romans 14:14 that *"I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself"*. Alcohol is not unclean as we would consider from the Old Testament. Indeed, everything made by God is good in its purpose. What is the purpose of alcohol?

Lemuel's mother gave us the answer by telling us who should have their senses dulled. Today, many medicines use alcohol. As well, we consider that the intoxicating effects of opioids and other drugs effective in the treatment of pain or health problems. In times past alcohol was the chief anesthesia for medical procedures. Obviously using drugs (or alcohol) for any purpose apart from pain relief, there was a place for it in the creation.

There are other Proverbs with deal with alcohol. Particularly, these other Proverbs point to the dangers of alcoholic consumption.

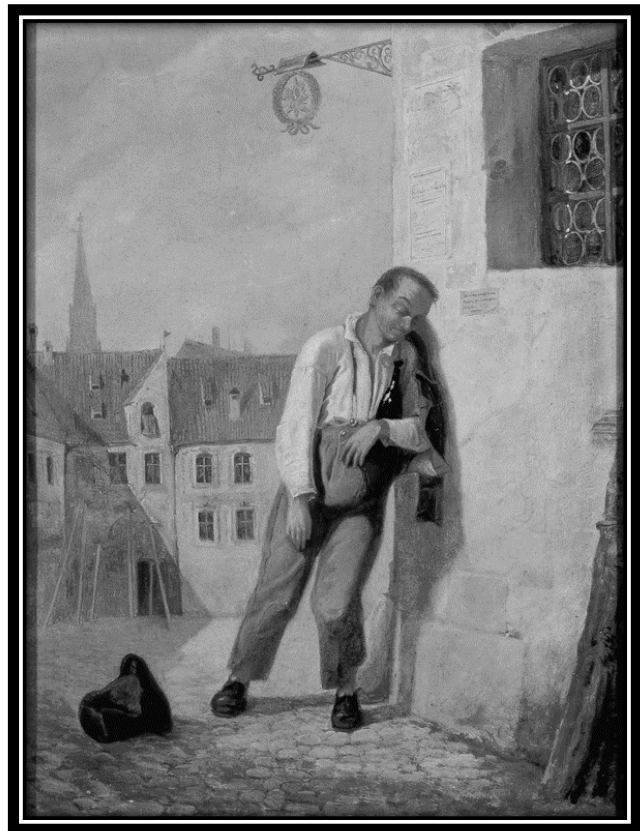
Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

Proverbs 20:1

Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way. Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.

Proverbs 23:19-21

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter



perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: "They have struck me, but I was not hurt; they have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"

Proverbs 23:29-35

In these Proverbs wine is associated with the sinful fool. It is not just alcohol that we must abstain from, but from the company of those who are caught up in the drinking lifestyle. These Proverbs point not only to the sinful consequences of drinking, but to the practical consequences of drinking as well: poverty and poor health.

Questions

1. How is drinking today a work of the flesh? What are the results of the works of the flesh?
2. Why might Lemuel's mother have given this advice to her son first?
3. Is drinking a modern problem only? How old is the problem of drinking and drunkenness?
4. How might alcohol have in the past been used as a medicine? Have things changed today in regards to pharmaceutical treatment?
5. How does drunkenness reduce one to being a fool?

LESSON 12: Proverbs of the Mouth
READING: Various

We have seen that there are a number of themes in the Proverbs. Perhaps no theme is as often addressed as our words. Here is where the fool and the wise man are distinguished most effectively in the writings of Solomon.

Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.

Proverbs 10:14

The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut out.

Proverbs 10:31

The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

Proverbs 11:9

By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

Proverbs 11:11

A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth, and the recompense of a man's hands will be rendered to him

Proverbs 12:14

A man shall eat well by the fruit of his mouth, but the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence. He who guards his mouth preserves his life, But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.

Proverbs 13:2-3

In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, but the lips of the wise will preserve them.

Proverbs 14:3

The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.

Proverbs 15:2

A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!

Proverbs 15:23

The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.

Proverbs 15:28

The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips. Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.

Proverbs 16:23-24

An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire. A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.

Proverbs 16:27-28

Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

Proverbs 21:23

A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

Proverbs 26:28

Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.

Proverbs 27:2

These are not all the Proverbs that speaks to our speech, but a sampling that provide us an idea that there are two perspectives on the mouth: the mouth of a wise man and the mouth of a fool.

1. The mouth of a wise man

A person who seeks wisdom has speech of certain characteristics. First, he holds his words until he has something worth saying. What is it that is worth saying? They are pleasant words, words of teaching. Compare this to Paul's admonition to the Ephesians: *"let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers"* (Ephesians 4:29). Consider that our virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 speaks in the wisdom of kindness.

Another characteristic is that he speaks rightly. This might again refer to the veracity of his words, but also his intent and purpose. The Proverb writer says that a man is satisfied with the fruit of his mouth when he speaks with wisdom.

2. The mouth of a fool

Solomon makes it clear that the fool is revealed by his words. This is precisely what Jesus taught: *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"* (Matthew 12:35-37). Evil speech reveals an evil heart, for *"those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man"* (Matthew 15:18).

Solomon speaks to the motivations of the fool and his speech. He says that it is his pride that causes him to speak as he does. The fool seeks the esteem of others, and opens his mouth to obtain it. Perhaps he even falsely flatters others. All of this is to satisfy his own ego. Solomon warns the wise not to praise themselves.

Finally, consider that Solomon repeatedly states that in the end, the fool's mouth is his destruction, and perhaps the destruction of all who listen to him. His mouth brings blows to him. His mouth can overthrow cities and destroy neighbors.

When we met the personification of Folly, the first thing we were told is that she was loud. We ought to guard our mouths carefully, lest we be called fools.

Questions

1. How is it that we can hold our tongue until we have something worth saying? Can we wait too long to speak?
2. How can our words impart grace to the hearers?
3. Jesus said that our mouth reveals our heart.
4. How do people open their mouths to receive praise?
5. What examples are there in the Scriptures of people who were destroyed for their words?

LESSON 13: The Prayer of Agur

READING: Proverbs 30:19

Agur is another writer in Proverbs of whom we know practically nothing. Like Lemuel, a few Rabbis believed that this was a *nom de plume* of Solomon; it could mean “gatherer”. But Agur offers some very important information, and his prayer in particular in verses 7-9 is very important to us as New Testament Christians. *“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope”* (Romans 15:4).

Agur begins with a bit of self-deprecation: I am not the smartest guy around. He means that he has not learned the wisdom of men (vs 2, *learned* wisdom). Today people want to be comforted by teachers or preacher with pedigrees from preaching schools or other academic institutions. Agur says he must be “stupid” to lack such. Paul makes a similar point in 1 Corinthians 1:21 (*“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”*).

But Agur points out, who really knows God? Who has ascended or descended? For us, we say that what is knowable about God is through His word. Agur seems to be pointing to Deuteronomy 30:11-12, where Moses said that the word is before us. Too, Agur’s points are identical to those made by God to Job in Job 38 . So, being a “dummy”, Agur only knows what God has spoken

Agur’s Prayer

Consider verses 1-6 a preamble to the prayer. In those passages, before he petitions God, he recognizes the Glory of God and the Divinity of the Revelation of God. Another prayer does likewise in the Bible, a prayer we are much more familiar with:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

Matthew 6:9

Agur’s petition is in two parts. First, he asks that God would remove falsehood and lies from his presence, that he would not be deceived nor sin.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Matthew 6:13

Second, Agur asks that God would provide him with the needs of the day. He calls this his portion. His logic is that if he does not have enough, he would profane God by stealing, and if he has too much, he would deny God in his abundance.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Matthew 6:11

It is important to consider the attachment of this message to the Proverbs of Solomon. Solomon sought possession, and it brought Him nothing (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11). He sought satisfaction in work and it too came to nothing (Ecclesiastes 2:20-21). As Solomon pondered his life, he saw that the only way a person can have a good life is to be content with what we have (Ecclesiastes 9:9-10). This is what Agur recognized; too many material things cause us to be less devoted. Jesus once asked us *"for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul"* (Mark 8:36)?

As Christians, we need to learn to be content and satisfied with what we have, and learn to live one day at a time. Paul described learning this when he said *"not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need"* (Philippians 4:11-12). He later told Timothy that *"godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment"* (1 Timothy 6:6)

Questions

1. What danger must we be watchful of when blessed with worldly knowledge (secular education, etc.)?
2. What danger must we be watchful of when blessed with abundance?
3. What danger must we be watchful of when we are impoverished?
4. Why did Agur spend time preparing his prayer? How did he prepare his prayer?
5. What does Paul mean when he says that godliness with contentment is great gain

LESSON 14: The Hard Proverbs

READING: Various

In the New Testament Peter makes the following observation: *“regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction”* (2 Peter 3:15-16). What is unusual in this passage Peter’s acknowledgment that some of the things Paul wrote (the Scriptures of the New Testament) are hard to understand.

Paul is not the only one who said things that were hard to understand. Jesus too often taught things that men did not understand. In Jesus’ Bread of Life sermon in John 6, we are told that *“many of his disciples, when they heard this said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?”* (John 6:60). In a survey of the Proverbs, we find that there are some Proverbs that are hard to understand. They are hard because they don’t make a clear, easy sense to us, or they are hard because we do not see them as literally true or our experience is that the things they say are not always true.

Too many people, when confronted with something that is not easy to understand, just give up. In John 6:66 we are told that as a result of the difficult to understand things Jesus had said, *“many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore”*. Others may confuse something difficult to understand with something impossible to understand. Of course, Peter did not say that what Paul wrote was impossible to understand, and Paul himself said what he wrote could be understood (Ephesians 3:4). But we need to see that Peter was telling us what NOT to do when we cannot understand something.

Sometimes, when a passage of Scripture is not easy to understand, we need to decide what it is not saying. Then we need to find another passage which might possible parallel this statement. Let us apply this in this difficult Proverb:

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Proverbs 26:4-5

What can we say is not happening here? The writer is not making a true contradiction. We know this because *“every word of God is tested”* and true (Proverbs 30:5). Removing

the idea that this is a mistake or error in idea, we then move to say that it must have a deeper truth than is obvious.

In this case, the idea presented first likely emphasis the idea of the folly of the fool. His words are words of folly; in the New Testament, Paul says that there is a form of “silly talk (*“there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting”* - Ephesians 5:4) that is profanity. Perhaps this passage would make more sense if it were rendered *“do not answer a fool according to his profanity”*.

Yet if the passage ended there, would it not imply that we simply let the fool rage without reply? We let the fool declare “there is no God”? This too would seem inappropriate. So then we see that we must *“answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes”*. As Christians we are commanded to be ready with an answer as to our hope, even for a fool.

Sometimes Proverbs in particular are hard to understand because we cannot see them as true. Consider these Proverbs:

The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life.

Proverbs 22:4

Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it

Proverbs 22:6

A gray head is a crown of glory; it is found in the way of righteousness.

Proverbs 16:31

Is it always true that the reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor and life? Does every child who is raised by Godly parents remain faithful? Does every man with white hair possess righteousness? We can all think of examples where these and other Proverbs are not always true. So is every word true or not?

We need to understand that the Proverbs do not present themselves as absolute truths, but true-isms. That is to say, they reflect an observable general truths. Generally speaking, when you live with honor, you have a better life. Generally speaking, children of obedient parents are more likely to remain faithful. Generally speaking, getting older brings wisdom. Of course it is not always true, and indeed sometimes there are a great many exceptions. But the truth is in the general idea.

Questions

1. What type of problem did Peter say those who twisted Paul's words have?
2. What was so difficult about what Jesus said in John 6 that many disciples left him?
3. If we answer a fool foolishly, what is the result? If we simply do not answer a fool, what might be the result?
4. How is it generally true that the reward of humility and a fear of the Lord are found in this life?
5. What New Testament office speaks to the idea that older men or women generally tend to have more wisdom?

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Solomon_in_paintings#/media/File:Brockhaus_and_Efron_Jewish_Encyclopedia_e3_292-0.jpg

ⁱⁱ [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Two_women_in_art#/media/File:Edgar_Degas_-_The_Bellelli_Sisters_\(Giovanna_and_Giuliana_Bellelli\)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Two_women_in_art#/media/File:Edgar_Degas_-_The_Bellelli_Sisters_(Giovanna_and_Giuliana_Bellelli)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

ⁱⁱⁱ [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:The_Life_of_Jesus_Christ_by_James_Tissot#/media/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_Jesus_Before_Pilate_First_Interview_\(J%C3%A9sus_devant_Pilate._Premier_entretien\).-_James_Tissot.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:The_Life_of_Jesus_Christ_by_James_Tissot#/media/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_Jesus_Before_Pilate_First_Interview_(J%C3%A9sus_devant_Pilate._Premier_entretien).-_James_Tissot.jpg)

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^v https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gari_Melchers_-_Marriage.jpg

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