

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Proverbs 1

The Proverbs are the accumulated wisdom with which God graciously endowed Solomon. He had shown a measure of wisdom in 1 Kings 2 in detecting the wiles of Adonijah but not so much wisdom perhaps in his hasty sentence of Adonijah to death. His dealings with Abiathar seem just; but again a little hasty perhaps with Joab, though he was aware of being the minister of the LORD to return his blood upon his own head (2.32). In 1 Kings 3, in response to God's invitation to "ask what I shall give thee," Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge the Lord's people and to discern between good and bad (3.9). Solomon's request pleased the Lord who replied, "Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee" (3.12). The quality of Solomon's exercise of this God-given wisdom (as distinct from his natural wisdom displayed in 1 Kings 2) is seen in 1 Kings 3. 16-28 and this book of the Proverbs is the distillation of years of experience.

The Proverbs direct us to exercise this God-given wisdom as distinct from any natural wisdom with which as human beings we may be naturally endowed. The experience of ruling in the Spirit (as kings unto God) is here made available by the same Holy Spirit to us, by moving King Solomon to write these things.

Now it was not a condition of Solomon being granted such wisdom that he should be already perfect. Far from it. Indeed, he asked because of a felt need. We are told in 1 Kings 3.3 that he loved the LORD. That counts for everything. God graciously declares that he may "ask what I shall give thee" but earlier in that same chapter we see that he had made affinity with Pharaoh's daughter and brought her to Jerusalem (thus by disobedience later undoing much of the wisdom with which he was entrusted) and that he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places (1 Kings 3.3). As an imperfect believer, yet a lover of the LORD, he was able to receive and exercise wisdom. The Holy Spirit has moved him to warn us away from committing the same sins as Solomon did, and other sins which may plague us as believers, by causing him to write Ecclesiastes which shows how empty (vain) everything seems to a sinning, and as yet unrepentant, believer. The sequel, equally graciously moved by the Holy Spirit, is the

Song of Solomon in which a restored Solomon (like the restored believer) is granted great intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We may receive this wisdom, though we are imperfect believers, because we love the Lord Jesus Christ. We are taught in 1 Corinthians 1:27-30 that God has chosen us as foolish things of the world, and weak things, and base things, and despised things to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. Christ is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. In Christ we may apply for wisdom in every situation – the most important and the least important; the short term and the long term. The Proverbs will school us from the very beginning of our Christian lives in the wisdom which is to be found in Christ, while it will supply the God-fearer (who may be elect but not yet saved) with secular good sense. We are instructed in James 1:5 to ask God for wisdom who will not tell us off for not having it. (I think that wisdom is here taken as an example of the way in which we may approach the Saviour for any necessary help, not only wisdom.)

In Proverbs 1:1-6 Solomon states the purpose of this particular collection, assembled under the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, for we read (1 Kings 4:32), “he spake 3000 proverbs; and his songs were 1005.” We have only one song by permission of the Holy Spirit and just this collection of Solomon’s proverbs.

The aim is for us to know wisdom and instruction and to perceive words of understanding. In other words - to learn to be wise and to receive instruction carefully; and to spot, distinguish and prioritise true words. The mastery of wisdom will enable us to be just, to discriminate in complex situations and be fair (exercising equity) and above board. Even the most disadvantaged learner will gather insight, while schoolchildren may add experience as they learn. Those already at an advanced stage of achievement will flourish by the application of wisdom to a multiplicity of situations and at the pinnacle of his/her career may impart strategic advice. Taught by the Holy Spirit the believer will be able to distinguish in the Holy Scriptures what is picture language (parables and proverbs) and unravel deep mysteries (dark sayings) as in Psalm 49:4 thereby assimilating the highest knowledge.

All wisdom begins with the fear of the LORD. An atheist does not even begin and may be deprived even of common sense wisdom. Proverbs 1:7 tells us “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” while Psalm 111:10 goes one step further and informs us that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” that is, knowledge applied in all sorts of life situations. And in what is probably the earliest book of the Bible, Job, contemporary perhaps with Abraham, we read “unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28). The conclusion of the whole purpose of attaining wisdom is to “fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

God addresses us through Solomon as sons and pleads with us not to despise these things and become fools. It is a characteristic of the unregenerate heart, or the careless believer, to despise the Lord's instruction. Two examples must suffice – from Jeremiah 6.16, 17. "We will not walk therein." "We will not hearken."

Firstly, we are exhorted to follow in the footsteps of our believing parents. Or if they are unbelievers at least to honour our parents and follow the example of their good ways until by coming to years of discretion we may learn a better way in Christ. And (it is picture language) their instruction will beautify us, for the Lord beautifies the meek with salvation. In Ephesians 5 & 6 husbands, wives, children, fathers and servants are addressed in turn concerning their responsibilities in the Lord. Children are spoken to directly, as they are in Proverbs 1.8 and other places. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long upon the earth." (Ephesians 6. 1-3). It is for parents to draw the attention of their children to these and similar passages if they are not aware of them or if they have been forgotten.

Now in Proverbs 1.8 and 1.10 (other places also) these children have grown up into teenagers or young men and women and are addressed directly. Of course they can and should be taught these things when younger and store them up in their hearts and be reminded of them. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not" (Proverbs 1.10). The first thing children and young people meet outside the home is the temptation to do things with their friends that they would not do at home or as individuals. They have to learn to consent not to things which, however tempting or plausible they sound, are not according to the Biblical standards in which they have been brought up. Many children, more particularly young people and young adults, do things at this time of life which live with them for ever and which they regret in later life. The Proverbs should form an essential part of the teaching of young people's groups.

"Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of the bird" (Proverbs 1.17). The bird is sensible enough to spot danger unless it is concealed. If young people are warned about these things it should be sufficient to turn them aside from evil. However, "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isaiah 1.3). Constant reminders are given us from the Lord because we are as stubborn in childhood and in youth as in adult life for, in that sense, the child is the father of the man. Satan is a great deceiver, a liar from the beginning, and we do not always spot his deceptions.

But it is their own lives the young are spoiling, even destroying, when they get so involved. "And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives" (Proverbs 1.18). While they plan to hurt others it is their own consciences and physical

lives that are impaired. It is at this time of life that smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, lust, covetousness and many other things take root and it may be among such friends that the seeds of discontent with being among the Lord's people and observing the Lord's Day according to commandment are sown. Furthermore greediness of gain soon sets in and becomes ingrained in lifestyle.

Now to this situation wisdom addresses itself but falls largely on deaf ears. They may not listen to the pastor or parent; sermons or pleadings. There may come a time when external pleadings are withdrawn if they are too long unheeded, but the Holy Spirit addresses the Proverbs that it may be available to sinners. How long will sinners continue unabated in their sin? Every moment is too long, for it leads to another sin, and another - heaping up destruction. "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man..." for thou "treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath" (Romans 2. 1,5).

"Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates: in the city she uttereth her voice..." (Proverbs 1. 20-21). This passage directs us to consider the love of Christ for sinners, that by open-air preaching, door to door visitation, tracts and other external means those who are passing by, ignoring the house of God where they might learn wisdom on a regular basis every Lord's Day, can yet be appealed to and warned. How few turn at this reproof! Yet some do, and for their sakes it is worth it to do these things as ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5.20).

"Turn you at my reproof: behold I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you" (Proverbs 1.23). Here the Lord Jesus Christ promises His Spirit in abundance (poured out) to those who repent, with a further promise of continual instruction to lift them far away from their former temptations and ignorance. He would rather be a kind personal Tutor than stand by and see men and women, particularly young men and women, continue heedlessly to destruction.

There is an awful consequence of ignoring the Lord's claims upon us, because we have immortal souls. While there is not a bird that perishes "without your Father" (Matthew 10.29) disobedient men and women may perish unaided by God. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10.31). "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh" (Proverbs 1.26). No sympathy comes from Almighty God when for years, as long as it suited us, we waved aside His loving approaches to us. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Psalm 2.4). Though dying men and women may brazen it out, yet they will not be without "a certain fearful looking for of judgment" (Hebrews 10.27); and though, in a settled course of sin men and women may say they do not care, there will be apprehension. If we do not choose the fear of the LORD, and it has to be a chosen direction, if we would have none of His counsel, who as our Creator has a claim upon us and will demand an account of our thoughts, words and actions, then

we may expect to pay the consequences. “But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil” (Proverbs 1.33). “Who maketh thee to differ from another?” (1 Corinthians 4.7) It is God who, if He grants grace to repent, distinguishes us from those who are allowed to continue in their chosen evil ways. It is a marvellous thing for, maybe, we ran our destruction awfully close and we have seen some who have gone that bit too far and never turned back.

“For the turning away of the simple shall slay them” (Proverbs 1.32). The act of turning away from God, however early in life, may precipitate a downward course that shall ultimately lead to destruction. Though it may be disguised by relative wealth and its trappings, if our priority is not “the wisdom that is from above” (James 3. 17) we will be deceived at last. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6.33) says the Lord Jesus Christ. And again, He pleads, “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16.26).