

**The Way of Skillful Living Described:
The Proverbs**

THOUGHTS

1. The book is a collection of several men apparently known for their wise sayings, predominately Solomon, King of Israel in the 9th century, some of his sayings were collected in the time of Hezekiah.
2. It seems viable that the function of the collection was to teach promising youth and prepare them for service of the state.
3. The foundation of skillful living, according to Proverbs 1:7, is the fear of God, the reverential respect for the authority of God. In the world of the Bible, theism, the person and character of God, was the foundation of ethics (morals).
4. Since Proverbs is a collection of short, parallel, contrastive statements that are often two-liners, it cannot be examined as either the telling of a linear story as in narrative literature or in a linear argument as in the epistles of the New Testament. Typically, therefore, most teachers approach the book topically, selecting subjects that reoccur throughout the collection.
5. The collections are several:
 - Wisdom for Youth (1:8-9:18), on topic in narrative form.
 - Solomon's sayings (10:1-22:16)
 - Sayings of the wise (22:17-24:34)
 - Later collected sayings of Solomon (25:1-29:27)
 - Wisdom of Augur, Lemuel, etc. (30:1-31:31)

The topic today concerns personal character qualities that are congruous with the Christian profession. The Bible frequently addresses the issue both positively and negatively. Job has rendered quite a verdict when he speaks of the origin of wisdom.

“But where can wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Man does not know its value,
Nor is it found in the land of the living (28:12)”.

Peter has a wonderful statement that reflects our topic and its fruit (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

“Now for this very reason (the granting of Gods promises) also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

These moral qualities are the fruit of wisdom that Job pondered, knowing they had a heavenly origin.

Trustworthy

"Many a man proclaims his own loyalty,
But who can find a trustworthy man (20:6)?"

1. Words come easier than the reality signified by them sometimes (one writer calls it "self-complacent goodness").
2. An interpretative translation might be: "Most men meet people who will do them occasional kindnesses."
3. Never does trustworthiness prove true than in little things.

Faithfulness

"A faithful man will abound with blessings,
But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished (28:20)."

1. Faithfulness is the barometer of true success in life.
2. One who seeks riches over faithfulness will find what is sought unobtainable.
3. Character is the litmus-test of a living skillful life more so than accolades and accomplishments.

Humility

"A man's pride will bring him low,
But a humble spirit will obtain honor (29:23)."

1. Here is the reality: whoever elevates himself will be abased and whoever walks in humility will be exalted.
2. Humbleness brings with it the capacity to learn, pride stifles learning.

Integrity

Like a trampled spring and a polluted well
Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked (25:26)".

1. "Trampled" suggests an action caused by animals, "polluted" the deliberate punitive actions of mankind. In either case, the beneficial is rendered unbeneficial.
2. Such images indicate the devastation caused by moral concession personally or societally.
3. The opportunity to be a blessing turns into a detriment. And loss.
4. One has stated, "The gross wickedness of the ungodly passes in silence. But Satan makes the neighborhood ring with the failings of those who profess to be Christians."

KINDNESS

"What is desirable in a man is his kindness,
And it is better to be a poor man than a liar (19:22).

1. Godly behavior is not purchased; it is the gift to all, a matter of character.

2. God's dealings with his people are grounded on this principle. Kindness is the glue that prevents anarchy in families and society.
3. A liar (one offering a mirage) is without kindness, while an impoverished truth-teller has character. Faithful love is better than being a false friend.

Praiseworthiness

"The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold,
And each is tested by the praise accorded him (27:21)."

1. Just as the furnace separates precious metals from rocks, so comments reveal a person's character
2. One might also interpret the proverb by saying that what we praise reveals much about our character.

"Like a city that is broken into and without walls,
is a man who has no control over his spirit (25:28)."

1. The point of the comparison to a broken-down city wall is that one who lacks self-control is vulnerable, being without protection.
2. The control of one's passions and desires are more a product of divine grace than it is a natural power (e.g., Cain, David).
3. As one writer has commented, "Oh, for the simple faith to draw out from this mighty source energy, perseverance, and triumphant victory!"

"A fool always loses his temper,
But a wise man holds back (29:11)."

1. The wise man holds his anger in check, but the fool is the slave of impulse when he chances to feel irritation.
2. Skill in life's choices is to know when to comment and when to remain silent. Perhaps a clue is to first ask yourself the motive for the nature and content of your reply. Should you offer it?
3. Of importance is the "always." Such does not characterize the child of God though it can surface. It is not habitual!

Strength and Honor

"The glory of young men is their strength,
And the honor of old men is their gray hair (20:29)."

1. Gray hair symbolized everything valuable about age in the ancient world: dignity, wisdom, honor, experience.
2. Every stage of life has a certain glory. Youth place their confidence in their own prowess and strength. Our culture places more value in the strength than in wisdom and experience, which "youths" lack.
3. At the very least, one can say that since the elderly have survived, they must know something.
4. Our culture needs both!

Strength in Adversity

"If you are slack in the day of distress,
Your strength is limited (24:10)."

1. You never know the limit of your strength until you find yourself in a faltering situation. Such recognition is a defining, teachable opportunity.
2. You know that you are weak in adversity when your first inclination is to retreat and quit.
3. Every Christian's heart responds to the confession that he/she tends to falter at times. "The strongest and holiest saint on earth is subject to some qualms of fear" (Bishop Hall). This arises not from the greatness of the danger, but from the weakness of his faith.

Teachable

"He whose ear listens to life-giving reproof,
will dwell among the wise.
He who neglects discipline despises himself,
But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding (15:31-32)."

1. Skillful living results from careful listening.
2. The way we receive a rebuke tests our character. It reveals whether or not we possess the graces of humility, sincerity, and self-knowledge.
3. Correction is infinitely preferable to the poison of sweet flattery.

Compassion for Animals

A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal,
But even the compassion of the wicked is cruel (12:10)."

1. They who delight in the destruction of inferior creatures will not be apt to be very compassionate and benign to those of their own kind," said John Locke. Conduct reflects character!
2. Why is this characteristic marked as a feature of a righteous man? Because it is the image of our heavenly Father, who cares for His creation.
3. Christian faith has profound implications for the care of creatures who have been placed under our authority.