

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

Trust in the LORD and do good;  
Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.  
Delight yourself in the LORD;  
And He will give you the desires of your heart.  
Commit your way to the LORD,  
Trust also in Him, and He will do it (Ps. 37:3-5)."

I waited patiently for the LORD;  
And He inclined to me and heard my cry.  
He brought me up out of the pit of destruction,  
out of the miry clay,  
And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.  
He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;  
Many will see and fear  
And will trust in the LORD Ps. 40:1-2).

This short study functions to draw our attention to the meaning of living our life well. The topic today concerns several additional character qualities that are congruous with Christian profession. The Bible frequently addresses these issues both positively and negatively.

**GENEROSITY**

"All day long he is craving,

While the righteous gives and does not hold back (21:26).

- a. In contrast to the fool who expresses desires for things without the effort to acquire them, the Christian actualizes desire by investing effort.
- b. The righteous are neither lazy nor laggardly. They know the value of work, giving maximal effort in the accomplishment of tasks.
- c. A valid biblical illustration can be seen in the story of Abraham and his nephew Lot. Lot chose the lush valley of the Jordan while Abraham took what Lot did not (Gen. 13). Prosperity allured Lot fleeing his city to live in a cave; Abraham died full of years and greatly blessed spiritually!

"He who is generous will be blessed,

For he gives some of his food to the poor (22:9)."

- a. While our culture values the accumulation of wealth as evidence of a blessed life, the Scriptures tell us that satisfaction does not come from accumulation but in the service of others.
- b. The ability to give, benevolence, is a luxury and privilege.
- c. The word "generous" literally means "a good eye" while the opposite, "an evil eye," means stingy, covetous. Jesus said this in Matthew 6:22-23, "The lamp of the body is the eye... if the eye is bad, how great the darkness (the context of the comment is the dichotomy between service to God or things). Misplaced perception leads to distorted values.

"He who gives to the poor will never want,

But he who shuts his eyes will have many curses (28:27).

- a. Sacrifice does entail deprivation at times, but the believer's reverence for the rule of God is our highest aim. So much so, we see meeting the needs of others as an expression of deep personal satisfaction.
- b. We were made to be givers, not clutchers. Giving is not limited to finances; it can be a kind word or a helping hand!
- c. Often it is said, "Covetousness indeed combines with reason to contradict the Word of God."

## PATIENCE

"He who is slow to anger has great understanding,

But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly (14:29)."

- a. Anger is not always condemned in the Scripture (only selfish motivation, demeaning rudeness, and violence in expressing it).
- b. What has God given us to address inappropriate, fiery responses?  
The witness of the Holy Scripture in its denunciation, examples, and consequences.
- c. Having a quick temper is giving way to the devil and grieving the Holy Spirit. It is contrary to the mind and example of Christ. He did not confuse righteous anger with an unrighteous response. Before His accusers, He was often silent. Before the money changers in the Temple precinct, He expressed anger. The differential issue is motive.

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,

And he who rules his spirit than he who captures a city (16:32)."

- a. Patience can produce more positive benefits than the use of force through military prowess.
- b. "Control his spirit" means one who has his emotional state under control. The inability to govern one's temper is disaster in the making.
- c. Is it wrong to put up with wrong? Is addressing a perceived wrong, right? Does the wrong establish the right to say things that ought not be said, the right to character assassination, or the sanction of overstatement? Are we called to be the judge or the instructor?

"A man's discretion makes him slow to anger,

And it is his glory to overlook a transgression (19:11)."

- a. Wisdom limits emotional expression at times. Prudence is often manifested in being "slow to anger."
- b. There is a time for silence; it is a remarkable character-quality. The virtue which is indicated here is more than a forgiving temper; it includes the ability to shrug off insults and the absence of a brooding hypersensitivity.
- c. Prudence delays the expression of anger over minor offenses, often passing over them without a negative rejoinder. We all need to subdue the enemy that has vanquished conquerors.

## JOYFULNESS

"All the days of the afflicted are bad,

But a cheerful heart has a continual feast (15:15)."

- a. This saying recommends a cheerful frame of mind, the "feast" image signifying the enjoyment of life's offering.
- b. The difference between the emotion of restriction or oppression and a cheerful frame is a matter of priorities, values, and object. Seeing the good fruit in a negative experience can turn overwhelm sadness into joy. True joy is neither circumstantial nor devoid of pain and

disappointment; it is in knowing that the love of God toward us makes the experience of life in the hand of God.

- c. The darkest of days can never make God's consolations and love disappear. He can sing in a prison as much as in a palace. Remember Paul and Silas in Philippi's jail (16:25-26).

"The heart knows its own bitterness,

And a stranger does not share its joy (14:10)."

- a. People in their deepest feelings of "bitterness" or "joy" alone can understand those feelings. While we can express empathy, we may not be able to identify with the depth of either. Each person must tread a solitary path, and in that path he must often be prepared to be misunderstood.
- b. An illustration is the experience of Michal, Saul's daughter and David's wife; she embraced David's successes as a warrior but could not identify with his deepest joy (the bringing of the Ark into Jerusalem, II Sam. 6).
- c. It is a proverb, an old saying written by Paul, "It is easier to weep with those who weep than rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15)."

"A joyful heart is good medicine,

But a broken spirit dries up the bones (17:22)."

- a. One's psychological condition affects one's physical condition: a healthy attitude fosters good health, but a depressed spirit ruins health.
- b. If I am a pardoned sinner, an accepted child of God, what earthly trouble can defeat me? Emotional health is a matter of a willful practice of focusing on God's person, greatness, and provision.
- c. Depression darkens the soul ("bones" being a metaphor for feebleness and weakness).

## DILIGENCE

"He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely,

But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully (10:5)."

- a. It is as important for us to know the times, and act accordingly, as it is for the farmer to harvest his mature crop.
- b. When the fruit of God's blessing appears for the taking, we ought not squander the privilege.
- c. Idleness in the context of opportunity leads to ruin. How sad it is to do nothing when there is so much to be done!

"A lazy man does not roast his prey,

But the precious possession of a man is diligence (12:27)."

- a. The ability to complete tasks is a gift from God; it is the mechanism given for our wellbeing.
- b. Solomon uses a metaphor to make his point: just as one who might hunt but never cook what he finds, so the lazy person never completes a project.

"In all labor there is profit,

But mere talk leads only to poverty (14:23)."

- a. Planning without execution is idle preoccupation.
- b. Why are people more given to empty talk than the accomplishment of tasks?

A worker's appetite works for him,

For his hunger urges him on (16:26).

- a. This verse is a parallelism form. The first line states a fact, the second a reason.
- b. The need for the necessities of life is the Lord's gift to us to avoid the tendency of laziness. Work is good; it keeps us from self-destruction.

## THOUGHTFUL PLANNING

"Commit your works to the LORD

And your plans will be established (16:3)."

- a. The word translated "commit" literally means "to roll (a command)." It means that we should converse with the Lord, seek His wisdom, in the planning process.
- b. Every plan in the will of God will come to fruition. Not every plan we have is pleasing to him; but for those that are, this verse is a great comfort.
- c. When we cast our thoughts and desires before the Lord, and it does not work as we thought, though the consequence may not be pleasant, we can take refuge that it was not the best for us. God loves us so much He is willing to keep us from ourselves!

"Prepare plans by consultation,

And make war by wise guidance (20:18)."

- a. While we are to seek divine guidance for direction, we should ask for the wisdom and perspective of others. Effective planning incorporates sound advice.
- b. While the metaphor relates to military action, it applies to all of us.

"Prepare your work outside

And make it ready for yourself in the field;

Afterwards, then, build your house. (24:27)

- a. A third expression of wisdom is the necessity of preparation for the accomplishment of any task. Do you have the right tools and materials? A wise builder collects his materials and then shapes them, and so builds his house.
- b. Also, in accomplishing a project you must learn the art of the prioritizing of sequence (First things first").

"Do not boast about tomorrow,

For you do not know what a day may bring forth (27:1)."

- a. Line one is instructive; line two is the reason for it.
- b. Be sure that you do not become a slave to your plans; God may have something better than what you can imagine. Be flexible!
- c. The verse is not ruling out wise planning for the future, only one's overconfident sense of ability to control the future—and no one can presume on God's future.
- d. In this life, humility is required; one must live from day to day, grateful for the life one has from God, with the awareness that it may be withdrawn at any time and that he must not speak or plan as if he himself had full disposal of his destiny and power over the future.