

A Grace Gathering

Lesson #6

21 July 2024

The Way of Skillful Living Described: The Proverbs

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever (Ps. 111:10).”

**“Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD,
Who greatly delights in His commandments (Ps. 112:1).”**

This short study functions to draw our attention to the meaning of living our lives well. Once again, the topics today concern several additional character qualities that are congruous with Christian profession. Lives built on the reverence for the God revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Harmony/Peacefulness

“Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it, Than a house full of feasting with strife (17:1).”

- a. The point of the proverb is a contrastive preference (little with quietness [peace] [literally, bread without butter] or much with conflict). Is wealth when it causes social disharmony valuable?
- b. The contrast suggests that economic prosperity has its own perils. Abundance may be accompanied by a deterioration in morals.
- c. This tells us the error of the cultural assumption that economic success will bring us happiness and contentment, that it is evidence of divine blessing. Wealth is not the answer to the woes of humanity.

Relationships

“A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity (17:17).”

- a. The verse is more accurately translated “the friend,” indicating that the subject is the nature of friendship, the defining quality of a true friend.
- b. In the second line “a brother” is a synonym for “a friend” and explains the nature of friendship.
- c. A “true friend” is a precious gift.

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy (27:6).”

- a. A “true friend” helps deter unhelpful and inappropriate behavior patterns even though it may hurt,
- b. Fainted “friendships” are destructive, unhelpful. To allow a friend to act poorly to his/her self-destruction is not friendship.
- c. A “friend” that is not so, one who seeks merely the benefit of self, is not a “true friend.”

Arrogance

“When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom (11:2).”

- a. Pride is rooted in the story of the Fall (Gen. 3:15); it is the outworking of the false assumptions of superior knowledge and right. There is no greater proof of proud folly than only to believe what we understand.
- b. The word “pride” literally means “to boil,” it is an emotional insubordinate state, an overstepping of boundaries.
- c. Pride leads to disgrace (the deflation of ego); a proper view of oneself leads to the exhibition of true wisdom.

Wealth

“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death (11:4).”

- a. Do we overvalue wealth accumulation in American culture? Could it be that we under-value religious instruction? In Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, a man named Ignorance is ferried over the river to life by Vain Glory where he climbed a hill alone only to be disappointed.

- b. When disaster strikes, “the day of wrath,” the day of divine justice, what is most useful: wealth or righteousness?
- c. What is the “righteousness that delivers from death?” In Proverbs, the equivalent is wisdom, the skillful living that begins with the reverence of God (1:7). Since the theme of the instruction is moral wisdom, righteousness must have a moral connotation. The opposite of wisdom is folly; “death” moral failure. Righteous living is not the cause of deliverance from death; it is the evidence that we have been delivered from death. The point of the proverbs has been summarized this way. “The wicked advantage themselves by disadvantaging others, but the righteous disadvantage themselves to advantage others.”

“Wealth obtained by fraud dwindles, But the one who gathers by labor increases it (13:11)”

- a. There is an adage that is true, “Crime never pays.” The warning here is another saying, “If it is too good to be true it is.” Quick gain may imply dishonesty.
- b. The NIV translated “by labor” as “little by little.” This suggests the value of diligence and modest incremental increase.
- c. One has wisely said, “All that man can have, we have on this condition: to use it ... to lay it out, to lay it down unto the honor of our Master, from whose bounty we received it.”

Speech

“A answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger (15:1).”

- a. The way one answers another person will influence the response.
- b. The word, “gentle,” suggests more than “soft;” the idea seems to be conciliatory, an answer that restores good temper and reasonableness.
- c. Bridges has a wonderful summary. “The gentle answer is water that quenches quarrels; a harsh word is oil that stirs up the fire. Man’s natural inclination is to give in to irritation, to justify oneself, and to insist on having the last word.”

“For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down (26:20).”

- a. Fire diminishes as the fuel supply; so, strife when there are no secrets.
- b. Whispering implies harmful secrets that are being shared about the one who observes the appearance of secrecy.
- c. “We may feel indignant at being accused of being a gossip. Yet it requires no ordinary exercise of Christian discipline to maintain the silence of love and to regulate both the tongue and the ear within its well-advised limits,” one has stated.

Consequences

“Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, But much revenue comes by the strength of the ox (14:4).”

- a. Where work does not take place, there may be an advantage, but without work there is want (an abundant harvest).
- b. There is a cost involved when it comes to managing life well. We must provide “hay for the oxen.” Nothing is free when it comes to gain.
- c. The point is that one must make an investment (obtain and feed the oxen) to get a large return.

A Father’s instruction

“My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments.

For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.

Do not let kindness and truth leave you. Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart (3:1-3).”

- a. There are two commands in the paragraph. The word, “teachings,” (torah),” refers to home instruction. The first set of commands are “do not forget” and “keep.” The promise is a long and peaceful life.
- b. The second command set (“do not let...leave,” “bind,” and “write”) suggests purposefulness and diligence. No specific promise is attached.

- c. As the ark of the covenant, the presence of God among His ancient people, was kept in the tabernacle, we must keep [God's] commands in our hearts, the very center of His presence in us.

“He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently (13:24).”

- a. Discipline is the evidence of love and care. The powerful verbs “hates” and “loves” stress the point—hating a son means, in effect, abandoning or rejecting him.
- b. There is a caution. Too much lenience and too much harsh discipline are equally problematic. Balance comes when the child has room to grow while learning limits. The motive must be instruction rooted in love and explanation.
- c. Bridges has a wonderful way of stating the meaning of the verse. “Every vice commences in the nursery. The great secret is to establish authority in the dawn of life, to bend the tender twig before the knotty oak is beyond our power. A child who is trained by parental discipline will probably keep this wholesome influence to the end of his life.”

“There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers (6:16-19).”

- a. These verses condemn seven actions of mankind that God opposes; four personal characteristics and three actions that are detestable to Him. “Seven” is often symbolic of completeness, actions totally contrary to the character of God.
- b. The seven detestable sins:
 - “Haughty” (prideful arrogance [Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod])
 - “Lying tongue” [Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira]
 - “Murder” [Cain, Manasseh]
 - “Scheming,” “Subterfuge” [Issac]
 - “Habitual misconduct” [Saul]
 - “False witnessing (lying [Christ’s accusers]). The tongue is mentioned twice.
 - “Fomenting interpersonal strife” [Rehoboam’s youthful advisors]

Family

“Grandchildren are the crown of old men, And the glory of sons is their fathers (17:6).”

- a. This idea comes from a culture that places great importance on the family in society; the older folks have preeminence in the family and receive the appropriate respect. Beyond the proverb itself is a profound assertion of the psychological interdependence of the generations.
- b. The possession of grandchildren brings unspeakable joy to grandparents. Grandchildren are the gifts of our children to brighten the aged, bright our spirits with hope, joy, and energy! What grandparent is not a proud one!
- c. Children gain their sense of self-worth from their earliest years in our homes! Parents are respected and honored by them, being their security and caregivers (also best friends).
- d. Sadly, we live in a culture where this is often not the norm! One generation can cause shame and a sense of worthlessness in another. One has said, “What a crown of thorns to each other are ungodly and graceless parents.”