

Proverbs

The Book of Wisdom

1. Wisdom

September 27, 2009

Compass – according to the definition of the dictionary, it is “an instrument for determining directions, as by means of a freely rotating magnetized needle that indicates magnetic north.” As long as it does not get interference from other metallic objects, it will point to the north at all times.

Each day, life confronts us with many decisions. The Book of Proverbs is a compass that helps us navigate the murky waters of life. It provides wisdom, instructions for living, and guidance for achieving strong character. Proverbs tells us how to succeed and do what is right in any situation – in a crisis and in temptations. Above all, this Book, Proverbs shows us that the source of all wisdom is a right relationship with God.

We are living in the information age. You can get just about any kind of information in a matter of a few seconds through internet, e-mails, TV or radio, etc. As far as I can tell, we do not lack in knowledge or information, but wisdom that comes from God alone. This Book tells us where to get it, how to get it and how to use it. It is about priorities and principles, not get-rich-quick schemes or success formulas.

A. THE MAJOR THEME OF THE BOOK

Obviously it is ‘wisdom’. The Book of Proverbs belongs to what scholars call the “wisdom literature” of the Old Testament, which also includes Job and Ecclesiastes. Why do we need wisdom from the Lord through this Book? Just because you’re a believer and you walk by faith, it doesn’t mean you put your mind on the shelf and stop thinking. The Lord expects us to apply ourselves intellectually and do some serious thinking as we study His Word.

B. THE STYLE OF THE BOOK

I am sure that while you read this Book, you’ve noticed that it is written in poetic style. The ancient Hebrews didn’t write their poems in rhyme like our poetry does. The Book of Proverbs was written in the form of couplets. We find three forms:

1) Synonymous Parallelism – Here the second phrase restates what is given in the first clause. In other words, it expresses the same thought in a different way.

Proverbs 19:29 Judgments are prepared for scoffers, And beatings for the backs of fools.

2) Antithetic (Contrast) Parallelism – Here a truth, which is stated in the first clause, is made stronger in the second phrase by contrast with an opposite truth.

Proverbs 13:9 The light of the righteous rejoices, But the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

3) Synthetic Parallelism – The second phrase develops the thought of the first.

Proverbs 20:2 The wrath of a king is like the roaring of a lion; Whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own life.

C. AUTHORS

In chapter 1, we're told that king Solomon is the author of the proverbs in this Book. But other servants, guided by God's Spirit, were also involved in producing this book. A group of scholars in King Hezekiah's day, in 700 B.C., who compiled the material recorded in chapters 25-29.

D. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Proverbs 1:1-7 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding, To receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion-- A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, To understand a proverb and an enigma, The words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

We don't study the Book of Proverbs to boast to others what we know, but to be mature in God – not just in biblical knowledge, rather knowing how to implement the knowledge into our lives so that we may bring honor and glory to our God. That is the bottom line.

Though the author Solomon has all that wisdom in the beginning, he ended his life with stupidity by following the pagan idols. That was waste, not wisdom.

Wisdom is an attribute of God by which He sustains, creates, and controls all things. Biblical wisdom begins with a right relationship with the Lord. The wise person believes that there is a God, that He is the Creator and Ruler of all things, and that He has put within His creation a divine order that, if obeyed, leads ultimately to success in God's way.

Wise people also assert that there is a moral law operating in this world, a principle of divine justice which makes sure that eventually the wicked are judged and the righteous are rewarded.

Biblical wisdom has very little to do with a person's IQ or education, because it is a matter of moral and spiritual understanding. It has to do with character and values. It means looking at the world through the view point of God's truth.

V7 of chapter 1 is the key verse of this Book. Without the fear of the Lord we would have no limit of sins in our lives. If we truly fear the Lord – of course, not in the sense of sheer horror, rather reverence – and acknowledge Him as our Master, Savior, King, the Lord and God, I am absolutely sure that we would not want to do anything that would bring disgrace to His name, nor displease Him with our disobedience. The fear of the Lord would generate affectionate reverence from our hearts to Him with love and humility.

E. WISDOM PERSONIFIED

Proverbs 8:10-31 Receive my instruction, and not silver, And knowledge rather than choice gold; For wisdom is better than rubies, And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her. "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And find out knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength. By me kings

reign, And rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, All the judges of the earth. I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently will find me. Riches and honor are with me, Enduring riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold, And my revenue than choice silver. I traverse the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice, That I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, That I may fill their treasuries. "The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, When there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills, I was brought forth; While as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, Or the primeval dust of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there, When He drew a circle on the face of the deep, When He established the clouds above, When He strengthened the fountains of the deep, When He assigned to the sea its limit, So that the waters would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth, Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, Rejoicing in His inhabited world, And my delight was with the sons of men.

Someone may raise this objection: "There is nothing in the Book of Proverbs about the gospel." I totally disagree. Jesus is there. The One in this Book whose wisdom it is, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

In a beautiful Hebrew poetic style, the author personifies wisdom as a human. Wisdom does not exist outside of God and it is an expression of His character and nature. Unlike pagan gods, God needs no outside counselor to give Him instructions. Jesus is the apex of God's wisdom according to Colossians 1 and 2.

F. THE REWARDS OF HAVING WISDOM

Proverbs 3:13-20 Happy is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding; For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, In her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, And all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who retain her. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens; By His knowledge the depths were broken up, And clouds drop down the dew.

Proverbs 4:5-9 Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you."

The word 'happy' – 'esher' is the same word as 'blessed' in Hebrews. By reading this, we could think that if we just have wisdom everything would go well in the way we want. No, it does not say that. By context, we learn that we get to have the understanding of the greatness of our God and obedience to Him in spite of the difficult situation we are facing. That is a blessing itself.

Wisdom can be defined as "applications of God's holiness in all we say, do and think".

Proverbs 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil.

G. SIMPLE AND TO-THE-POINT INSTRUCTIONS

Proverbs 4:14-15 Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil. 15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on.

Proverbs 10:12-13 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins. Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding, But a rod is for the back of him who is devoid of understanding.

Proverbs 10:18-19 Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, And whoever spreads slander is a fool. In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

We don't have time to cover every verse that relates to wisdom in the Book of Proverbs. That is why I handed out the Scripture list last Sunday so that you could read ahead. I expect all of you to follow through for your own study.

The Book of Proverbs has little to say about the life to come. It focuses on this present life and gives guidelines for making wise decisions that help to produce a satisfying godly life.

A willingness to obey is essential. Obedience is the action part of spiritual knowledge. The Holy Spirit teaches the serious, not curious.

Wisdom's words in this Book are plain, spoken clearly and openly so that there can be no confusion. Of course, those who reject the Lord don't understand what God is saying, but this is not because the Word of God is complicated or unclear. It's because sinners are spiritually blind and deaf. The problem is with the hearer, not the speaker. Mark Twain is supposed to have said, "It isn't what I don't understand about the Bible that worries me, but what I do understand."

1 Corinthians 2:12-16 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

H. WHERE DO WE GET WISDOM?

No man's writings can provide what the Lord has brought to our attention through this Book. Are you a businessman or woman? Read the Book of Proverbs, you will get the wisdom about your finance. It is so much better than the flimsy and untrustworthy forecasts that come the Wall Street. Are you parents and want to know how to raise your children? This Book teaches how to raise them according to the Lord's way and how to encourage and discipline them. Are you facing a very important decision? Seek the counsel of God through this Book. Do you have problems in your marriage? You cannot find a better marriage counselor than the Bible. Hear from the Inventor of the marriage.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I. WHY DO WE NOT HAVE WISDOM?

Everyone of us lacks wisdom. There is not a person on this earth who has wisdom apart from God. In addition to that, I see three reasons why people choose not to have wisdom.

1) Because he doubts. The person must receive it in faith.

People with analytical minds have hard time accepting what the Bible says as is, because they try to comprehend the faith in God with what they can understand and know. We have limited intelligence, but God doesn't. We are not even in the same dimension. The intellectual minds try to fit God in their box. He cannot be boxed in. No wonder it doesn't work and no wonder they cannot accept its face value of faith. So if you want wisdom from God, you simply come to Him in faith that He will give you what you need to do His will.

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

2) Because we think that we are wise in our own eyes.

Can you name a few people you know who think that they know everything and tell you that all the time? I am sure you do. Or you might be one of them.

Proverbs 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil.

3) Because we intentionally ignore the wisdom from God.

Proverbs 1:20-22 Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares. 21 She cries out in the chief concourses, At the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words: 22 "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorers delight in their scorning, And fools hate knowledge.

J. APPLICATIONS

1) The fear of the Lord would generate affectionate reverence from our hearts to Him with love and humility.

2) When we need wisdom from the Lord, we must come to Him with faith and obedience.