

Proverbs II

Last week, we began a discussion of the Book of Proverbs. Today, let's continue a survey of the proverbs. We can only look at a few of them, but it should be instructive.

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (14:12). Here is a core teaching of Scripture. God created us to obey Him and to serve Him, for He has good purposes for us. We are not autonomous beings. We were given (a certain degree of) free will, of course, but not to use it to rebel against our Creator. The “way that seems right to a man” is following the person's own desires, rather than following God's will. So that rebellion has to be punished. Satan's great deception is to get us to ignore God, or to suppose He doesn't exist, or at least to live as if God hasn't given any instructions to us. A radical transformation is needed when we come to Christ: we need to repent of our love of independence and self-will and live as our Father in heaven wills. Or else.

“A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps” (14:15) means a lot to us today. “Simple” is the same as fool. Our nation is saturated with supposedly intelligent people who believe all kinds of fantasies, “narratives,” and ideologies. For example, there's billions of years and Darwinism, and there's Marxism, and of course “climate change.” There's also Islam and other religions that come from afar. There's “identity politics” and “systemic racism” too, quite popular today. And Scientism. All these (and more) are for “simple” people. In contrast, the “prudent” one is the wise person who obeys God's Word. Not that he just gives mental assent to all that's in the Bible, but that his walk thru life is defined by the Bible.

“The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.” This proverb, 15:3, is both scary and precious. It warns, and it comforts. In Revelation 5 we read of the Seven-fold Spirit of God who sees everything in the world. It should be that way, after all this whole cosmos is His creation. It's transparent to His eyes. As Creator, He should know everything that happens, even every thought and motive of every creature. If God is “keeping watch” that means He also has total control of everything that happens. The “wicked” can only carry out their evil with God's knowing assent. (Ethicists have a problem with this, but God is greater than their carefully reasoned thoughts.) Let's observe here that there are only two categories of people, the wicked and the good. No one is neutral, or in the middle. We should also keep in mind that “the good” are those who are obedient to God's Word, who live righteously.

“All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord” (16:2). This proverb is weighty. It drives me to my knees. Whatever we do, we (falsely) suppose we're doing well. None of us murders or steals. We do acts of kindness, etc, instead. We think we're good people. Yet... I know that I don't have pure motives for whatever I do. The easiest person to deceive is oneself. We seldom realize how pervasive and powerful the sin nature is that dwells in us and seeks to control us. God knows *why* we do what we do, He knows what kind of person we are in our inner-most being, and He's repulsed. That's why we must have Jesus. We must be in Christ, or we're doomed, every one of us.

“The Lord works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster.” Proverb 16:4 means that whatever happens in the world, whether it's political, social, or cultural, or a natural disaster, some circumstance in a person's life, or the outcome of a national election even, whatever it may be, God has an ultimate purpose for it. He has an agenda, a plan and a timeline, and although we can't know its details, His Word paints in broad brush strokes what it is. Let's continually rejoice that whatever the newsmedia report, whatever we hear or see happening, is another aspect of God's will and plan for His creation being fulfilled. Unlike the Muslim god, Allah, who is capricious, the God of the Bible is good, loving, just, and merciful. He has made promises in His Word that He must keep, for He cannot deny Himself. We have been adopted by a very great, loving and gracious God. Hallelujah!

“Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.” In this proverb, 16:19, we're to be like Christ, identified with Him, having His mind. He was lowly in spirit as He went to Calvary. He allowed the Jew and the Romans to oppress and crucify Him. Because in God's sovereign will, that worked to make salvation and blessing available to all. Seeking to avoid oppression, trying to avoid the weakness of one who is persecuted or oppressed, places us with the proud, who are constantly striving to gain something for themselves, such as power, or wealth, or fame. Jesus placed this proverb at the top of the Beatitudes as the key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

“He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends” (17:9). In this world saturated with sin, offenses must come. It's unavoidable. The great issue is, how do we respond to them? On

college campuses today, students are taught, no, encouraged to not just get even, but to utterly vanquish the offender. But there's a better way, the way of love. Notice that love doesn't just ignore the offense, pretend it didn't happen. No, love actively "covers it over." Love is to control all that we do, including when offenses come at us. To "repeat the matter" does the opposite. It intentionally causes harm. We need to think deeply about ways to show love, and how we too easily can deny love.

"He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done." Proverbs 19:17 is thought-provoking. God identifies with the poor and weak. When we show kindness – in whatever way is helpful – to those in need, we're doing it to God. This doesn't mean that poor people are saved. And it doesn't mean rich people are beyond the place of blessing. It does mean that we're to be sensitive to the plight and needs of others – as God is. The wise person, the one who practices righteousness, is others-oriented. In this sin-saturated and physically cursed world, plenty of people all around us necessarily have needs, and if we have God's Spirit dwelling in us, we'll do what we can to help. The promise of a reward is because God is just. Or, it's an expression of the law of sowing and reaping.

"A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?" (20:24). This is a deep proverb. I hesitate even to reflect on it. It seems to say that we aren't the free agents we suppose we are. We're given a degree of freedom to act independently, but God in His sovereignty controls us nevertheless. It doesn't mean we're like puppets and God pulls the strings. Rather, it's that God has such total and absolute control over His creation that even with the freedom we have, God's will is always accomplished. We fulfill His great purposes whether we're aware of it or not. Sadly, our view of God is weak; many of us actually prefer deism, belief in a god who isn't interested in His creation or what happens. But the God of the Bible, Jehovah God, rules His creation with intense interest and purpose. No detail escapes Him. As the silent, invisible God has ultimate say over what we do, it's hard for us to grasp what's going on.

"A wise man attacks the city of the mighty and pulls down the stronghold in which they trust" (21:22). If we're saved, we're involved in warfare. We can't escape it. Satan owns the city and the stronghold, and we're here to show those entrapped by Satan's dominion how to escape his grip. That's why we debunk Darwinism, which unbelievers trust in. But we need to do more. And we *can* do more, because truth is on our side. The church's apologeticists have done terrific work showing the banality and falsity of all that Satan offers unbelievers. But the church in America has been asleep, not doing its work of carrying the fruit of apologetics to "the city." No wonder the national election went as it did! Atheism is stupid. It can be shown to be stupid. The problem is, we just don't want to "attack the city." May God have mercy on us.

"Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life." This brilliant proverb, 22:4, goes to the key of what's needed for blessing: humility and the fear of God. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. No one can approach God without acknowledging his or her creatureliness, sinfulness, inadequacies and moral failures. We confess to God we're lost unless He intervenes for us. We know inside us that we're not able to stand in His presence. Humility is the natural stance of a creature who knows who God is and what He's like. The fear of God also is a natural creaturely attitude when we realize how awesome *and demanding* God is. No one can stand self-confidently in His presence. He has the power and the holy will to punish all rebellion and all evil-doers, for in perfect justice He must do it. In humility and fear we flee to Jesus the Jewish Messiah and King, our Savior. He rescues us from deserved wrath.

"The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit; he who is under the Lord's wrath will fall into it" (22:14). Here's another deep proverb. Paul may have been thinking of this when he penned Romans Chapter 1. God is sovereign, and He's just. And we need to fear Him. We don't play games with God. One aspect of being judged for rebellion is being consigned to yet further condemnation. The result is unavoidably being forever lost. Believing in evolution, and thereby becoming an atheist, is a judgment for prior rebellion or hard-heartedness. Believing in Marxism is God's judgment. Believing in Islam is similarly God's judgment. Becoming a homosexual is a judgment. A life of pandering sexual lusts is judgment. The prophet Ezekiel understood this: The people of Judah went after idols as a judgment because their heart was far from God. And then because of their idolatry, they were thrown into exile. An adulteress, by the way, is a metaphor in Proverbs for foolishness and unrighteousness. She's the opposite of wisdom. (More on this next week.)

"Buy the truth and sell it not; get wisdom, discipline and understanding" (23:23). America today has abandoned interest in truth. Many don't believe there even is such a thing. It's just a social contrivance, they say. Actually, their problem is a *fear* of truth, which is why its existence has to be denied. God's Word is truth. Jesus is truth. His words are truth. Truth is so precious that this proverb says to expend whatever it costs to have it, then retain it, hold it close. Wisdom is living out truth. Discipline and understanding are needed first to know how to put truth into practice, and then to do it.