

Proverbs III

In the past couple of weeks, we've looked at some of the proverbs to see how instructive they are. Today, we'll step back to get somewhat of an overview of the book, and of course also look at a few more proverbs.

In Hebrew, as in many other languages, nouns have gender. Solomon used this grammatical fact to compare wisdom with folly. In Hebrew, the noun, *hokhma* (wisdom), is feminine. That's why in the Book of Proverbs, wisdom is a lady. Thus, **"Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets, she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech..."** (1:20-21). In other words, the righteous person will not keep silent, but proclaim publicly God's truths, the wise person declares to others what God's will is for a society. How else will they know? This verse condemns modern American Christianity for having become a personal and private religion. But notice in the verses the pronouns "her" and "she." Wisdom is a lady. Proverbs 3:13-18 speaks of Lady Wisdom: **"Blessed is the man who finds wisdom...for she is more profitable than silver...she is more precious than rubies...her ways are pleasant...her paths are peace...those who lay hold of her will be blessed."** It's elsewhere in Proverbs. For example, **"Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you...Esteem her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head..."** (4:6-9).

Just as wisdom is a lady, foolishness is a woman too, but an adulteress. **"My son, pay attention to my wisdom...For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall...her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to *sheol* [the grave]. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not"** (5:1-6). Adultery is faithlessness, it's disloyalty. So the adulteress represents foolishness. Now, foolishness to us today is comedy, it's clowning around, something to smile at. In Proverbs, foolishness is not living according to God's commands and instructions. Foolishness is deadly.

In Proverbs 5:15-23, Solomon seems to be warning his son to remain faithful to his own wife. But really what Solomon is doing is encouraging his son to stay faithful to God's wisdom. In some places, the wicked woman is a prostitute, as in, for example, 6:26 and 7:10ff. With a gift of supernatural insight, in writing these proverbs, Solomon is probably reflecting on Genesis 3 and 4, where it seems there are two Eves. There's the wicked Eve who listened to the Serpent, and there's the faithful Eve, Adam's wife, who, in 4:1, believed God. (In Revelation also, the last book of the Bible, there are two women: the wicked harlot in Chapter 18, and the godly woman of Chapter 12.)

The above discussion explains Proverbs 31:10-31, the so-called Epilogue to the book. In the early chapters of Proverbs, Wisdom is a lady. And at the end of the book, either serving as bookends or as a climax (or both), we have another lady. This lady at the end is the epitome of virtue. She is the ideal woman. Her character is perfect. That's because she embodies Wisdom. Wisdom is practical; it expresses itself in the nitty-gritty of life, in *doing*. The righteousness that God demands of us is not just mental assent to a set of doctrines, but living life according to His revealed will. Although throughout Proverbs, the focus seems to be on men ("listen my son," "He who...," "A man..."), in reality, Proverbs is essentially all about two women.

Going further, in Proverbs Chapter 8, Wisdom personifies God's attribute of wisdom. Read the chapter. It's magnificent! Then read again Colossians 2:2-3, **"...that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."** And 1 Corinthians 1:30, **"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."** Paul understands Proverbs, and he's saying that God's wisdom and righteousness became embodied in a living Person, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah and King, and by grace being united with Him, His wisdom and righteousness become ours. That's justification. So, the Spirit of Christ indwelling us means we can actually fulfill God's righteous demands as we live out His revealed will, to the glory of God.

By the way, there's one proverb that needs to be rewritten. Unfortunately, 26:4-5 has been misunderstood by most translators. It should read like this: **"Not answering a fool according to his folly, you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly! Or else he will be wise in his own eyes."** We're to challenge fools, not ignore them. Because if not challenged, they will suppose they're in the right. Now, let's examine a few more proverbs.

“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (19:21). The news media knows nothing of God’s existence. Political analysts blivate endlessly with their secular commentary, networks of people conspire to accomplish this or that goal, and uber-wealthy elites plot and fund grand schemes for the world, without the slightest understanding that it’s God who has a plan and purpose for His creation. Even at a personal level, we make plans for something or other that we want to do, oblivious to the fact that God supervises *everything*. And everything falls into place according to the outworking of God’s will. Nothing happens by chance. Nothing happens that surprises God. Some people think God is watching us to see what we do, as if He’s a spectator. Nonsense. He’s a sovereign Ruler.

In 20:9, we read, **“Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin’?”** Solomon knows something too many of us today don’t, namely, self-righteousness is deadly. I suspect that massive numbers of church-attenders in America are hard-core, self-righteous people, in spite of (possibly) hearing the Gospel every week. Although they assign a role for Christ, in their inner-most being, they suppose themselves to be good persons, worthy of God’s blessings. But Solomon knows better. No one can stand in the presence of a holy God because of our inherent sin nature. Whatever good things we’ve done don’t and can’t cancel out our sins. We want to overlook our sins. God doesn’t. Our sins are forever in front of His face, each sin a slap in His face. The only remedy for sin is Christ. We need to be exceedingly careful about our soul because it lasts for an eternity.

“Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked.” Here, in 25:26, Scripture condemns compromise. Faced with differing opinions, Western civilization exalts compromise as the way to keep relationships amicable, the way to move forward with policies or objectives, and a way to express loving tolerance of others. But if antifreeze is mixed with chocolate milk, the mix is poisonous. It can’t be drunk. Bible expositors have compromised with Darwinists, adulterating the church’s doctrines of creation and redemption. Church leaders in some parts of the world have compromised with Marxists, producing a toxic, nonsensical theology. Compromise with evil is evil still. At a personal level, we must guard our soul with utmost diligence, because the path to apostasy begins with compromise, and there’s way too much in the world on offer for us to compromise with.

“Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it fully” (28:5). Young people today are screaming in the streets for “social justice.” They don’t know what justice is. Neither do the activists leading the parades or teaching in college classrooms. The plea for “social justice” is really the cynical use of a biblical idea being exploited in a not so veiled grasping for power. Justice derives from God, and it is expressed in His Word. Only by reflecting on what God has done in the Person and work of Christ Jesus can anyone begin to grasp what justice is. We need to think carefully about current events because the days are evil, and so are those who clamor for change. Pagans, or unbelievers, have a perverted sense of morality. Of course, poor people can be denied justice, and righteousness requires that we attend to that (see 29:7). A wise person is discerning.

“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (28:13). Solomon knew this from his father’s experience. When confronted by the fact of God’s existence and knowing what God is like, we can only fall to our knees in despair. We know we’re sinful and worthy of God’s wrath. And so we discover that God also is gracious, thus He has provided for us a Savior, and His mercy abounds toward us. Then, experiencing His goodness, what other course is proper but to repent of our sins so as to live going forward as God would have us live, holy, as He is. This is the Gospel. Why is confession and repentance demanded? Because in perfect justice, God expects us to take responsibility for our sins. Free will requires a corresponding accountability. Universal salvation is a fantasy.

“Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble” (28:14). A resounding message of the Old Testament is, Don’t harden your heart! The people of Israel repeatedly failed either because they didn’t fear God, or because they hardened their heart toward God. Christians, beware. God is no soft, loving Daddy.

“The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright” (29:27). We live in a sin-saturated world, and in this world, people divide into two categories. This is the message of Proverbs. And it’s unavoidable that there’s animosity, partly because the unrighteous are shown up by the righteous. Righteous people don’t despise the unrighteous people, rather they abhor their unrighteousness. The unrighteous, however, despise righteous people. Political pundits decry the division of America into the “woke” and the “deplorables.” But it has to be that way.