

The Book Of Proverbs

Sunday School Class – Lesson 2

Prov. 1:20-33

“Proverbs divides humanity into two classes: the wise and the righteous over against fools and the wicked...the wise heart produces righteous behavior, and a foolish heart produces wicked behavior...There is no third category, no in-between.”¹

Humanity is divided into two groups:

There are those who, being righteous, embrace wisdom.

There are those who, being wicked, embrace folly.

Anyone who hesitates between wisdom and folly is called “simple” or “gullible” and those people are counted among the foolish.

“Until the gullible (the simple) make a decisive decision for wisdom, they suffer the fate of fools (1:22-33). Though the gullible, unlike fools, do not despise wisdom, they have not made a commitment as those who fear the Lord. (1:7; 9:10).”²

“The complacency of fools destroys them” (Prov. 1:32b)

The Personification of Wisdom & Folly

The Call of Lady Wisdom

“Wisdom cries aloud in the street...at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: “How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you...” (Prov. 1:20-23).

“Does not wisdom call? Does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud: “To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the children of man. O simple ones, learn prudence; O fools, learn sense. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right, for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them. They are all straight to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge. (Prov. 8:1-10)

¹ Bruce Waltke, Proverbs, Vol.1, p.93

² ibid

"I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me...riches and honor are with me—enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold...I grant an inheritance to those who love me." Prov. 8:17-21)

"Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight." (Prov. 9:1-6)

The Call of Woman Folly

The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense she says, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol. (Prov. 9:13-18)

She is loud. Her adornment is not "the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious."

She is seductive...or very alluring.

She knows nothing. She has rejected the knowledge of God, so she knows nothing of eternal value.

Those she seduces are as good as dead...they are in the depths of Sheol.

But the opposite is true of those who embrace Lady Wisdom:

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed. (Prov. 3:13-18)

"Proverbs appeals to the son to choose between two paths: the way of wicked sinners, or the path of wisdom and life. This two-fold division (reminiscent of Psalm 1, and using very similar language) is part of the basic message of the book."³

The Father in Prov. 1-9 wants his son to make the right choice.

³ Josh Blount, Wisdom Literature, Lecture 8, pg. 9

The Friends of Wisdom

“Because of this basic antithesis between the wise and righteous on the one hand, and the wicked and fools on the other, it is appropriate to see all the various characters in Proverbs as either friends of wisdom, or its enemies.”⁴

Proverbs Speaks of “The Wise”

The wise are not “wise in their own eyes”

Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes?

There is more hope for a fool than for him. Prov. 26:12

The wise are eager to learn:

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;

Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. (Prov. 9:9)

The ear of the wise seeks knowledge. Prov. 18:15

A wise son hears his father’s instruction. Prov. 13:1

The wise receive correction:

Reprove a wise man, and he will love you. (Prov. 9:8)

Reproofs of discipline are the way of life. (Prov 6:23)

Whoever heeds reproof is prudent. (Prov. 15:5)

Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life. (Prov. 10:17)

He who listens to reproof gains intelligence. (Prov. 15:33)

He who hates reproof is stupid (Prov. 12:1)

The ear that listens to life giving reproof will dwell among the wise (Prov. 15:32)

The wise person walks with other wise people

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise

But the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Prov. 13:20)

The wise person spreads knowledge and wisdom from his heart

“The lips of the wise spread knowledge, not so the heart of fools” (Prov. 15:7)

The wise person is prudent

“He who gathers in summer is a prudent son” (Prov. 10:5)

“Whoever restrains his lips is prudent” (Prov. 10:19)

“The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way” (Prov. 15:8)

“The prudent gives thought to his steps (Prov. 15:15)

The wise have discretion

“Discretion will watch over you” (Prov. 2:11)

⁴ Josh Blount, Psalms and Wisdom Literature, Lecture 8, p. 9

"Keep sound wisdom and discretion; they will be life to your soul" (Prov. 3:21)
"Incline your ear to my understanding that you may keep discretion" (Prov. 5:2)
"A man of understanding walks straight ahead" (Prov. 15:21)

The wise have understanding

*"The purpose of a man's heart is like deep water
but a man of understanding will draw it out" (Prov. 20:5)*

The wise have self-control 17:27, are patient (14:29), hold their tongues (11:29) can plumb the depths of another's heart (20:5), and keep a straight course...⁵

Proverbs Speaks of "The Righteous"

These are the same people as "The Wise"
They are contrasted with "The Wicked"

They are also known as "the blameless, the upright, the good."

*Righteousness is a pattern of life, not merely specific acts. It is a matter of the heart (10:20).
The righteous depend on the LORD... "The righteous are willing to disadvantage themselves to
advantage the community; the wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage
themselves...the wicked forsake God, but the righteous cling to him."⁶*

The Good Neighbor

He is a man of peace: He is not only reluctant to start strife (3:29)
He is reluctant to spread it (25:8-9),
And he is disarmingly kind (see the rising sequence in 24:17,19, 25:21,22)

*"Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the
Lord see it and be displeased... "Fret not yourselves because of evildoers... "If your enemy is
hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap
burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."*

The good neighbor will realize that silence is often wiser than criticism:
*Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense,
but a man of understanding remains silent. (Prov. 11:12)*

The good neighbor realizes that a person who has failed
should evoke help rather than contempt (Prov. 14:21)

He realizes that the distaste with which one views another man
may owe more to one's own evil heart than to his (Prov. 21:10).

⁵ Bruce Waltke, Proverbs, Vol 1, p. 96)

⁶ Ibid, p. 97

For all this, his kindness must not overbalance into sentimentality:
he must be able to keep his distance from some:

*Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man
lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare. (Prov. 22:24,25)*

He will say “no” to an unwise transaction with a neighbor:

My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor...(Prov. 6:1-5)

He will say “yes” to a someone who legitimately needs help:

*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to do it. Do not say
to your neighbor, “Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it”—when you have it with you.
(Prov. 3:27-28).⁷*

The Good Friend⁸

Fair weather friends are many in Proverbs:

*“Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend...everyone is a friend
to a man who gives gifts...All a poor man's brothers hate him; how much more do his friends go
far from him! He pursues them with words but does not have them.” (Prov. 19-47)*

Constancy

*“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a
brother.” (Prov. 18:24)*

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

“Do not forsake your friend or your father's friend”. (Prov. 27:10)

Candor

“A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.” (Prov 29:5)

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” (Prov. 26:10)

*“Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor
than he who flatters with his tongue.” (Prov. 28:23)*

⁷ Derek Kidner, Proverbs, p. 44

⁸ This section drawn from Kidner, p45

Counsel

“Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.” (Prov. 27:9)

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. (Prov. 27:17)

Tact

“Tact is respect for another’s feelings...

The examples in Proverbs are of all-too-familiar lapses:

Outstaying one’s welcome (or forcing one’s friendship on a person), (25:17)

Being hearty at the wrong time, when its unwelcome (27:14) or even cruel (25:20);

Not knowing when a joke has gone far enough (26:18,19).”⁹

Conclusion

“While other parts of Scripture show us the glory of our high calling, this book instructs in all minuteness of detail how to “walk worthy of it”. Elsewhere we learn of our completeness in Christ (Col 2:10); and most justly we glory as “joint heirs with Christ. We look into this book, and, as by the aid of the microscope, we see the minuteness of our Christian obligations; that there is not a temper, a look, a word, a movement, the most important action of the day, the smallest relative duty in which we do either deface or adorn the image of our Lord, and the profession of his name.”¹⁰

⁹ Kidner, Proverbs, p. 45

¹⁰ Charles Bridges, Proverbs, Preface, pg. xii