

Redemption Through the Bible

Bible Study

*A Study of the
Book of
Proverbs,
Ecclesiastes
and the
Song of Solomon*

By
Franklin Camp



Franklin Camp
(1915-1991)

Brother Camp was born in Munford, Alabama, in 1915. He began to preach in 1935. His father and grandfather were both preachers of the ancient faith before him. Both would be deeply pleased to see the great work that their son and grandson has done and continues to do by word of mouth and by the prolific pen he wields so mightily and magnificently. Brother camp attended David Lipscomb College and while there formed a lifelong friendship with brother Willard Collins. They were roommates in Lipscomb. He labored locally with the Munford, Alabama Church, his home congregation, for twelve years; Park Avenue in LaGrange, Georgia, for two

years; the church in East Gadsden, Alabama, thirteen years; began in 1962 at Shades Mountain congregation in Birmingham for some ten years; came to Adamsville Church in 1974 where he worked for some twelve years; went back to East Gadsden for two years and left in 1988; and returned to the Adamsville congregation until his death in 1991. Long ministries have steadfastly characterized his local ministries. His work of faith and labor of love among these churches have been fruitful and faithful. Since 1972 he has devoted his time to writing, lecturing, giving special lessons to Bible teachers, and holding gospel meetings throughout the country. "How to Study the Bible," "Evolution," "The Work of the Holy Spirit," and "Inspiration of the Bible" have been a few of the special themes on which he has lectured through the years. Much of Brother Camp's material has been made available through the years in book form or on cassette tapes and now on CD.

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THE WISDOM OF THE REDEEMED, THE EMPTINESS OF LIFE WITHOUT IT AND REDEMPTION'S LOVE SONG

**A study of the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes
and the Song of Solomon**

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4-11-25

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Any money realized above expenses in the sale of this book will be placed in the Franklin Camp Preacher Scholarship Fund to be used in furthering the education of men to preach the gospel.

Foreword

I wish I could have been one of the fortunate to spend some time under the feet of Franklin Camp, whether in his Preacher's Classes, or in this case, in the audience when teaching this series of auditorium classes. I have heard him on a few limited occasions early in my life and late in his. However, to be able to hear the audio recordings of his lessons is just as profitable as if I were there. The work that I have spent in transcribing and editing has resulted immeasurably in my personal growth, and I pray that this book will help others in the same way.

While I have tried my absolute best to retain every word and phrase in the original stance in which Franklin Camp spoke, I used editorial means to make the material more compatible in this format. Rest assured that the result is the exact material that he presented. Even many of the discussion questions are exact questions he would use in his teaching. The only portion of this work that is mine exclusively is the topical headings, provided for ease in teaching for this format (to which I tried to use my best judgment in determining the outline and order he used).

I am deeply thankful for the elders of the Adamsville congregation. I consider it an extreme privilege to have worked closely with them and one with whom Franklin Camp also greatly influenced, Bobby Duncan, for several years. My family and I look back on our time spent with them with nothing but complete fondness. I am thankful for their part in the decision to make these lessons available in this format, and I appreciate their trust of me in my part. I am also thankful for the current eldership under which I serve—the elders of the Munford congregation—who give me the flexibility to allow me to work in such fashion. In addition, I am thankful to my coworker, Jason Mullenix, who helped edit my manuscripts. I am indebted to BJ Clarke for his breakdown of proverbial themes to which I used in chapters 4-6—please consult the 2003 POWER Lectureship book, The Sayings of Solomon, for additional resource material. Let me add one additional note to these three chapters of this book—brother Camp sporadically skipped from verse to verse from Proverbs 10-29 and highlighted as I have included. I rearranged his comments to a more thematic arrangement for better utilization in this class material. Again, rest assured that the commentary included completely belongs to brother Camp—it is simply in a different order.

I wish to thank my wife, Melissa, and our three children, Christopher, Courtney and Cameron, who all have sacrificed at times in allowing me to work on this project.

The same is true of Franklin Camp as the Hebrew writer wrote of Abel: "...*he being dead yet speaketh*" (Hebrews 11:4). May God richly bless this work, and may he receive all the glory.

Introduction

When studying the book of Proverbs, I want to suggest reading these proverbs and selecting one proverb each week, choosing a Bible character that fits that proverb. Let me give a few examples. “*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall*” (16:18)—Nebuchadnezzar. “*The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot*” (10:7)—Dorcas (Acts 9:36-39). This will help one study along with the book and think about attitudes in relationship to people.

As we study through the book of Proverbs, we are not going to look at every single proverb, because we could spend an entire lesson almost on every proverb. In addition, that would not keep in purpose with my approach in teaching the books of the Bible. How do these fit in the scheme of redemption?

Franklin Camp
Deceased

Lesson 1

A Father Addresses His Son – Part I

Lesson Text: Proverbs 1

Introduction to the Book of Proverbs

There are proverbs in other parts of the Bible (I Samuel 10:11-12; 24:13-14; Jeremiah 31:29-30; Luke 4:23). Therefore, the book of Proverbs does not contain all of the proverbs in the Bible.

We have our own proverbs: “A red sky in the morning is a sailor’s warning; a red sky at night is a sailor’s delight,” “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” and “a stitch in time saves nine.” These are not inspired, and are not necessarily wise proverbs like those in the Bible.

A proverb is something that gives a principle of truth without any details. Thus, it just states the truth. Occasionally, the Bible will expand a proverb with another portion of scripture concluding the proverb by adding additional information to it. The book of Proverbs sets forth **general** rules and principles. For example, the general proverb contained in the book is that God blesses the righteous materially as well as spiritually. That is a general rule, but Job teaches that there are exceptions to it. In addition, it teaches that the wicked are not prosperous, but that is not always so. This is the key to understanding Proverbs 22:6: “*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*”

Solomon wrote most of the proverbs in this book, although not all of them. Therefore, the time of the book (at least those written by Solomon) is while Israel is still living in the land of Israel (I Kings 3-4).

Most of the proverbs express attitudes. Wrong attitudes always create difficulties for the individual as well as others, and proper attitudes bring about good results.

This book of Proverbs is one of the greatest books of the Bible that deal with human relationships. It contains so much information and many principles essential for good relationships. If we want to learn how to get along with other people, this book is invaluable. If we would digest the truths found therein, it will have a tremendous impact upon our lives in getting along with others (parents/children, wives/husbands and all relationships).

Proverbs emphasizes the importance of wisdom (1:7; 9:10). Three primary things in the book are essential to wisdom: proper knowledge of God (3:6) that expresses one’s relationship towards God, proper recognition and respect of parents (1:8) that emphasizes one’s relationship to his family and proper attitude toward the world, evil and material things of the world (1:10) that emphasizes one’s relationship toward evil, wrong and material things.

Therefore, throughout the book, these proverbs deal with these relationships.

It is interesting that Proverbs begins with instruction of a father and closes with virtue of a mother. Thus, what valuable information for children and parents are contained therein!

Importance of Wisdom (Proverbs 1)

Proverbs 1 deals with the importance of wisdom. Proverbs 1-9 are instructions from a father to a son.

One must appreciate wisdom and understanding, which comes from instruction (1:1-2). Therefore, we must have the right attitude toward instruction.

The ASV translates "*instruction of wise dealing*" (1:3-4). "*Justice*" is doing right and treating others right. "*Judgment*" is dealing with people fairly and recognizing their rights. "*Equity*" emphasizes fairness and impartiality, along with the previous two words.

The way to gain wisdom is to be willing to listen and learn which is available for everyone (1:5-6). God does not hand wisdom out to us on a silver platter. Anyone can become wise that is willing to learn and apply principles—these deal with application of life. Therefore, we have no excuse: "Oh, but that is just the way I am!" I do not have to be that way, because I can change. The fact that the gospel and redemption is for all means there is the potential and possibility of every person changing for the better. I do not have to stay the way I am when there are attitudes I possess that I should not possess.

We need to develop four fundamental attitudes (1:7). First, we must develop proper attitude toward God. We cannot know God unless we have the proper attitude toward him. There must be appreciation and understanding of his greatness, majesty, goodness, love and all of his other traits. This is the beginning of wisdom. One who teaches and does not know God will never become an effectual teacher. To be at his/her best, there must be proper knowledge of God. Second, we must develop proper attitude toward truth. One cannot have proper attitude toward God and improper attitude toward truth. Sometimes truth cuts across the grain and strikes at wrong attitudes we may have. He has already emphasized the importance of hearing. Third, we must develop proper attitude toward self. I cannot have right attitude toward God and wrong attitude toward self. Many of our problems develop from wrong attitudes toward self. For example, if I think I am worth nothing, then it will affect the way I live (cf. Matthew 25:24-25). The wrong attitude of himself grew out of his wrong attitude toward God. Therefore, he thought he could not do anything but hide the talent. In addition, wrong attitudes toward self bring about guilt, which tremendously affects our lives. Fourth, we must develop proper attitude toward others. One who does not possess these first three proper attitudes will always have bad attitudes towards other people. Most of the time, our attitudes toward others are rooted in wrong attitudes toward ourselves. For example, suppose I am proud. As a result, I will be arrogant, which affects my relationship and attitude toward other people.

Therefore, the beginning place of helping our relationship with others begins with the proper attitudes of God and truth and allows these to mold my attitude of self. The combination of the three will help mold our attitude toward others. We will never have proper attitudes toward others unless we see others and ourselves through the wisdom provided by divine instruction in the Bible.

There is a difference between wisdom and facts. Wisdom is the application of facts. One of the things wisdom deals with is common sense. One might have facts, but not use them. They lack the element of common sense. Thus, we can denote wisdom as common sense—taking truths and applying them to life and relationships.

Remember that Proverbs 1-9 consist of a series of addresses of a father to a son. Solomon may have been thinking about David's own advice to him. Yet, to see the practicality of it, remember that Rehoboam was the son of Solomon. He created the problem that led to the division of the nation. Solomon laid the foundation, but it took place during Rehoboam's reign—taxation based upon a refusal to listen to wisdom. Keep Rehoboam in mind as we study Proverbs 1-9. If Rehoboam had listened to the proverbs of his father contained in Proverbs 1-9, Israel would never have divided. Rehoboam and his attitudes ignored his father's wisdom. Even Solomon ignored the wisdom of his own inspired proverbs (Ecclesiastes). In fact, the book of Proverbs is a great book for young people, especially the first nine chapters, which particularly contrast wisdom and folly (foolishness). Many times, Solomon presents wisdom as a person and presents folly as a person. For example, the wicked or "*strange woman*" (four times in Proverbs) denotes the nature of wickedness and the allurements of the world and evil in deception. Christians must always remember that God is our Father, and he has provided for his children divine instructions and wisdom. We will do well to listen to them and apply them to our lives.

Look at the importance of a young person's attitude toward his parents (1:8-9). One of the most basic and fundamental lessons of life for a young person is to learn to develop the right attitude toward his parents. Therefore, parents will seek to create the right relationship with their children. This begins when parents have a right relationship with God and have the proper concept of themselves and the proper values of life. Therefore, parents will form these attitudes in these verses in the early years of a child's life. When parents form right attitudes in a child's life early, then rewards and blessings will follow, dressing a young person's life (1:9), which is significant concerning the tremendous problems we have in the home today. Now, there comes a time when the child will begin to grow. As he does, he moves away from home. The first world in which a child lives is his home atmosphere. The way he learns to act and react at home will determine how he does so in the world. If a child grows up learning and developing selfishness in the home, he will express such in the world, and it will react in his relationships to others. A child that thinks everything is theirs and does not learn how to share will try to live that way in the world. Consequently, they will always be unhappy. In addition, the child reared to be the center of

attraction will strive for such in the world. We cannot live the way. The world will not act that way. This shows the importance of parents forming proper attitudes in their children at home.

The child begins to form friendships (1:10-19). This passage discusses attitudes that are wrong and will get young people in trouble. This father knew the importance of peer pressure. One resists peer pressure by developing proper attitudes toward the real values of life. Companionship is neither good nor valuable if it is destructive and leads one to ruin.

There is the attitude expressed toward material things (1:19). The world emphasizes material things as being the standard of acceptance. When children accept these, they are walking the way to heartache and to all kinds of ruin and destruction.

In view of this, here is wisdom personified (1:20-33). This recognizes the real problem of people, especially young people, listening. The tendency of the young is the attitude that they know everything. The young person has moved into the streets of the city (1:20-21). Whenever children move away from home where there are no restraints, there is grave danger unless they developed proper attitudes early in life. Unless children practice the principles in Proverbs 1:8-9 at home, they will forget about God when they leave home. Parents carry their children with them to worship, but say, "You are going with us," without teaching why they should go, and help them see the values that come from such. In addition, they failed to demonstrate in their own lives proper attitudes to accompany them when they left home (for example, Rehoboam). Therefore, they scorned the things their parents taught them at home, because they did not appreciate the values and because parents did not demonstrate them at home (1:22-23).

This passage shows how inward attitudes will affect us because of a failure to properly heed and listen (1:24-25). When life falls in ("*calamity*" – 1:26), the prodigal son illustrates such (Luke 15). In addition, think how "*fear*" grips the lives of people and the effect it has on people. Many are afraid even to get out of their houses. Look at the inward attitudes of "*distress and anguish*" that are destructive (1:27). No one can be happy and suffer with these things. Think upon the medical value of hope! "*Distress and anguish*" affect us physically. One might say, "He is a pain in the neck," or "He makes me sick to my stomach." Let such people upset us enough and we will suffer from these attitudes. We have the choice as to the attitudes we will develop (1:28-29). We can change if we want. Even if our parents did not mold us properly, that does not mean I have to stay that way.

"...*be filled with their own devices*" describes the emptiness of the life that does not have proper attitudes (1:31). When we fill it with the wrong things, we still will experience emptiness. The rich man of Luke 12 tried to fill his life with things, but it still left him empty. That is always true.

Think about dwelling safely and quietly without fear of evil (1:32-33). One can reach such by taking divine wisdom and learning the attitudes it teaches and applying these attitudes to my life.

Conclusion

Look at the price we pay for not developing these attitudes. Proverbs 2 shows the price to pay for proper attitudes and wisdom is far less than the other price without such.

Questions

1. What is a proverb? What type of proverbs does the book discuss?
2. What three things in this book are essential to wisdom?
3. Which four attitudes do we all need to develop?
4. From Proverbs 1:10-19, what will be the attitude of my child toward his closest friends?
5. How does one resist peer pressure?
6. What good is companionship if it is destructive? What value is it if it leads one to ruin?
7. How valuable is safety without fear of evil? According to the book of Proverbs, how can one reach such?

Lesson 2

A Father Addresses His Son – Part II

Lesson Text: Proverbs 2-4

The Price of Wisdom (2:1-6)

Everyone would like to have wisdom, knowledge and understanding. The question is not whether any would like knowledge or wisdom, but “How much do we want it?” Proverbs 2 sets forth the price of wisdom and knowledge. “*If*” is conditional (2:1). There must be a receptive heart. I cannot have such without it. The price I must pay for knowledge of the Bible begins with a receptive heart. In addition to receiving it, I must take them into my heart and remember it. I must hold onto them. Think about Matthew 4. Jesus had received the word of God and remembered it.

In addition, I must incline my ear (2:2)—I am interested and desire to receive such. In other words, some whose hearing is not quite adequate have to lean over to hear. It shows interest in hearing. It is the attitude of inclination. Then, I must apply my heart.

I cry after knowledge and lift up my voice, indicating strong desire (2:3).

Think about the amount of energy expired in obtaining material things (for example, our jobs). When we are willing to utilize that same kind of energy and effort in obtaining knowledge and wisdom of the Bible, we can obtain such (2:4). One woman came to brother Gus Nichols after one of his sermons and said, “I would give the world to know as much about the Bible as you do.” He replied, “That is exactly what it costs. If you pay that price, then you can know as much as I do.”

Therefore, here is the progression of conditions—receives (2:1a), remember (2:1b), rise (2:2a), make it relevant (2:2b), urgent request (2:3), and realize the effort it takes (2:4).

Compare “*Then*” (2:5) with “*If*” (2:1), “*So*” (2:2), “*Yea, if*” (2:3) and “*If*” (2:4). For the one that applies the things in Proverbs 2:1-5, the Lord will give wisdom (2:6). Therefore, if we pay the price, then we can have the wisdom set forth here.

The Basis of Wisdom (2:7-9)

“He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path” (Proverbs 2:7-9).

The Value of Wisdom (2:10-22)

Wisdom will help us avoid perils (2:10-11). We will avoid the way of the evil man (2:12-15). We will avoid the way of the strange woman (2:16-19). He concludes this section by reminding us of the value of wisdom in avoiding perils (2:20-22).

The Need of Remembrance in Wisdom (3:1-35)

He encourages his son to remember (3:1-4). Peace is one of the rewards of knowledge and wisdom (3:2).

Here is the proper attitude (3:3). "*Bind them about thy neck*" (cf. Deuteronomy 6:8). The Pharisees misunderstood this. This is why they put scriptures on their enlarged phylacteries. In other words, this emphasizes the importance of carrying it around with us. Keep it in our mind. Carry it wherever we go. "*Write them upon the table of thine heart*" signifies permanence. This is the importance of remembrance (II Peter 1:12-14). Deuteronomy emphasizes the necessity of remembrance to the second generation of Israelites. It is easy for us to forget.

The reward of remembrance will be good relationships with God and others (3:4).

Proverbs 3:5 gives positive advice about how to live. Solomon contrasts between "*trust*" and "*lean*." Trusting indicates leaning upon God, as a man leaning on another for support [standing up and walking after knee surgery] (cf. Isaiah 37:14-20, 36-38; Acts 27:25). "*And the sons of Israel are humbled at that time, and the sons of Judah are strong, for they have leant on Jehovah, God of their fathers*" (cf. II Chronicles 13:13-18, Young's Literal Translation).

"*In all thy ways acknowledge him,*" not some; it is easy to acknowledge God for some, but not all! These verses are the best advice for children leaving home to go on their own!

This danger is especially true in young people (3:7). They think they know more than anyone else does, especially more than their parents do. Rather, the older I get, the more I realize how little I know. The older I get, the more I realize my parents knew. Maturity will do that.

This language suggests physical well-being from attitudes (3:8).

This is what life is all about (3:9). We are to use our material possessions to honor God.

Proverbs 3:10 gives general principles of physical prosperity of the righteous.

Proverbs 3:11-12 gives the importance of instruction.

Here is how to be happy (3:13). Most are interested in such.

Here is the value found in wisdom and knowledge (3:14-16). Wisdom provides what these can never supply.

Proverbs 3:17-18 shows the quality of life gleaned from wisdom.

Solomon pictures wisdom and discretion as ornaments (3:19-22).

“*Then*” marks the result (3:23).

Wisdom and knowledge are better than Sominex (3:24). Here is how to have a relaxing, sweet sleep.

Wisdom will help with things that happen unexpectedly (3:25-26). We cannot always anticipate everything that comes up.

Proverbs 3:27-28 shows the importance of a benevolent attitude in order for there to be good relationships. One of the best things to establish good relationships with others is an attitude of benevolence. Solomon stresses the importance of not procrastinating in doing good deeds (3:28). The danger is that we may see the opportunity to do some good deed, procrastinate, and then we may not do it. The results are that we will first lose the benefits of what it would do for us, and then we will lose the influence and affect it would have on other people. We will rob others and ourselves of something that will contribute to good relationships.

Do not involve us in futile and useless things (3:29-30). Some things are better if we leave them alone.

“*Envy thou not the oppressor*” (“*a man of violence,*” ASV) (3:31).

He mentions scorners (3:34). These are contrasting attitudes. James 4:6 and First Peter 5:5-6 are based upon this verse.

The Failure to Apply Wisdom (4:1-27)

Doctrine includes everything (4:1-2). This sounds like Solomon received some advice from David and that he failed to apply such and suffered problems that grew out of that (4:3-27). It seems that he refers to himself as a personal example.

Think of the values contained in the word of God (4:3-9).

Here is teaching and practice (4:10-11). He taught him and led him. This is important to be effective.

Here is the importance of holding fast to instruction (4:12-13). We need to hold onto it.

The path of the just is contrasted with the way of the wickedness as light and darkness (4:14-19).

The margin says “*medicine*” instead of “*health*” (4:20-22). Wisdom and knowledge are good medicines. Not only does it provide sound sleep (3:24), but it is a good tonic and medicine.

“*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*” (4:23). This is the reason that knowledge and wisdom are so important (23:7). Think about all the books authors are writing today on positive thinking. People have made millions of dollars from such, but it has been right here in the Bible all along. What we think affects how we will live. When we fill our minds with knowledge of the Bible, then we have the right kind of information. When applied, we are using wisdom to enable us to live life at its best. Thus, we are to “*keep,*” or guard, our hearts, being careful what enters our minds, because what we take affects our thinking, and our thinking affects how we live (for example,

Jacob's reaction to the bloody coat of Joseph). Therefore, the information must be right information, and then we can use it properly.

We must put away some things (4:24-27), including lips that are not speaking truth (4:24).

Questions

1. How much do we want wisdom?
2. What good is the knowledge and wisdom found in divine instruction for me in a particular situation in life if I do not even remember what the Bible teaches about how to act in such circumstances?
3. According to Proverbs 2, what are some values to wisdom?
4. How important is remembrance in wisdom?
5. Have we slept and through the night because of tension woke up still sleepy? Have we ever awakened still exhausted and tired? How can wisdom aid such?
6. Why is it important to guard our hearts?

Lesson 3

A Father Addresses His Son – Part III

Lesson Text: Proverbs 5-9

Warning of an Evil Woman (Proverbs 5)

In Proverbs 5, there is the warning of an evil woman. These figures used by Solomon are sometimes personifying wickedness as a woman. We ought to think about these principles in relation to temptation. All of us are tempted—this is not limited to young people. These may be a symbol of the allurements, methods and means of deception of the world!

These attitudes are to give attention to instruction (5:1-2). The words “*attend*” and “*bow*” suggest close attention and a receptive attitude, ready to learn and apply. Therefore, Proverbs 5 emphasizes the importance of purity of life and the ability to avoid temptation. Many times, temptation catches us because we do not think far enough ahead (5:2). The word “*discretion*” underscores a well thought-out plan and suggests the importance of being thoughtful. We live in a careless way without giving thought and preparation to the things we may confront. If we do not do these things, it may catch us off guard.

Here is the danger of deception (5:3); this is how Satan works—deception.

We need to learn to stay away from it (5:8). The advice given to alcoholics is to avoid places and people that would tempt them to drink. That is true of any temptation—all of us have our strengths and weaknesses. It is foolish for one to put himself in a position where something will tempt him wherein he knows he is weak. This is good instruction for all of us—we should have proper attitudes toward temptation by not placing ourselves in situations that would be unbearable.

This warns about the dangers of the sins of immorality (5:11-13). He also shows remorse after something is over when it is too late (5:12). Judas is a good example. He was remorseful, but not penitent (cf. II Corinthians 7:8-10). The time to listen is before we allow ourselves to be misled. The attitude of reception and learning must be there (5:13).

There is difficulty in understanding what Proverbs 5:14 means. Some think that by allowing oneself to become involved in sin of adultery discussed in Proverbs 5, it might have reference to one called before the congregation and stoned to death. I am not sure. Certainly, there is the danger of being involved with the wrong kind of people and allowing them to influence us.

Here is the bondage one is in when he fails to realize the danger of engaging in sin (5:22). This is how one develops bad habits—trying it for the first time, knowing how evil it is. It may not be easy to give it up (i.e., drugs).

Wisdom in Daily Life (Proverbs 6)

These are practical instructions—remember that proverbs are truth in action and in daily activities.

Here is the danger of surety (6:1).

One difficulty in all relationships is our tongue (6:2). The tongue is a revelation of how we are on the inside (Matthew 12:34-37).

Here is the importance of honest work and one willing to engage in work (6:3-11). This is an attitude towards work illustrated by an ant, who works without a boss standing over him encouraging him to remain busy (6:6-7). Our attitude towards work is our attitude of our philosophy of life. When we fail to work honestly, it indicates that we want something for nothing. It shows a lack of integrity. Here are the provisions provided by proper attitude of work (6:8). There is a great difference in one finding himself in situations of need and someone simply wanting a handout. We must distinguish between the two. Our welfare system has encouraged such attitudes (cf. II Thessalonians 3:6-12). Here is a lazy person—one who does nothing but sleep (6:9-11).

Here are attitudes of one who creates mischief and “sows discord” (6:14, 19). Far too many times, one disrupts unity by bad attitudes. Prior to Paul establishing the seven pillars of unity (Ephesians 4:4-6), he mentions attitudes that precede it (4:1-3). Therefore, there must be proper attitudes as well as doctrinal truth for unity to be the result. So many times, churches split, not because of doctrine, but because of attitudes.

There are things God hates and attitudes that are hateful. Look at the body language in this passage (6:12-13, 16-19). Think about these attitudes.

- “*A proud look*” – Pride of heart is one of the most common attitudes that is more destructive than any other attitude. It blocks God from doing anything for anyone (Matthew 5:3). Pride gives a false concept of ourselves. Two men were talking with brother Gus Nichols about their problem in a congregation. One admitted privately that he had done wrong and was willing to confess and ask forgiveness. The other said, “I would split hell wide open before I admit I was wrong and ask him to forgive me.” Brother Nichols replied, “The road is wide open and you are on your way.” There is the danger of pride.
- “*...a lying tongue*” – We are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:25).
- “*...hands that shed innocent blood*” – murder
- “*An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations*” – We do not need to think about evil or revenge. This attitude will always disrupt good relationships.
- “*...feet that be swift in running to mischief*”
- “*A false witness that speaketh lies*”

- Yet, above these that God hates, sowing discord is an abomination – “...*he that soweth discord among brethren.*” Unity is something precious in the eyes of God. Sin separates. Thus, God based the unity between man and himself on the absence of sin. The sinless life of Christ rendered it possible to remain in close, constant fellowship with God. Therefore, unity is important. This is why he hates the attitude of sowing discord. The Lord’s Supper represents a united church (I Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17-19). Therefore, we can sow discord not only with false doctrine, but also by attitudes and things that we can say.

Here is the importance of holding onto these things with the words “*bind*” and “*tie*” (6:21). Solomon personifies wisdom as giving instructions (6:22). Our appreciation of such will help us in difficult situations. Young people can avoid temptation because of instruction imparted by parents. Parents are not wasting their time in teaching them.

In relation to immorality, we cannot play with sin and not get burned (6:27-28)!

He warns about jealousy (6:34). This is another destructive attitude. Those who are jealous are among the unhappiest people, struggling with their own insecurities. Out of that comes jealousy, and they cannot trust anyone. One who cannot trust others will never enjoy good relationships, which one bases on confidence and trust—this is why we need to live and act so people will be encouraged to trust us.

Wisdom in the Feminine Sense (Proverbs 7)

Solomon personifies wisdom by being a sister and female relative, person of strength, integrity and purity (7:4). From such, we get the idea of the value of a woman having spiritual strength and a pure life. A woman is strong within the home (Moses’ mother, Timothy’s mother and grandmother). Literal sisters can have a tremendous influence upon her brothers in helping them avoid things in which they do not need to get involved.

Solomon writes about the importance of avoiding temptation (7:8). This is throughout Proverbs 7—the danger of the appeal of the woman.

Here are the consequences of such (7:23). The struggle with temptation is a matter of life and death. It is not simple.

Wisdom’s Appeal (Proverbs 8)

Here is the appeal of wisdom. In contrast with the evil woman of Proverbs 5-7, she slips around and is not open.

Wisdom does not sneak around like the wickedness personified by the woman (8:1). Wisdom is open, because its purpose is to do good things and not to do evil.

Wisdom comes directly and openly (8:2-4).

Wisdom simply tells the truth and does not hide behind falsehood (8:5-7).

Wisdom is not crooked or false (8:8).

“They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge” (Proverbs 8:9). We tend to think how difficult it is to understand the Bible, but truth is not too difficult to understand. There are certainly some things hard to be understood (II Peter 3:16), but truth also has a simplicity to it (i.e., Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7).

Proverbs 8:10-12 gives the value of wisdom and knowledge.

Solomon contrasts attitudes that are destructive with the fear of the Lord (8:13). There can be no compromise between good and evil. The fear of the Lord means that I must hate and oppose evil! There is a relationship between the evil way and pride and arrogance.

Wisdom is not weak (8:14). Right is always strong! It is never weak. It may appear weak to the world when viewed from that standpoint. When Christ died, it appeared evil had won and truth lost! Yet, that is not true—when one waits until resurrection, one will see something completely different. That is always true!

Here is the importance of rulers having wisdom (8:15-16). Those who have authority should be men of character and controlled by Biblical attitudes. One would take a bribe only because principles of righteousness have not influenced him.

“Blessed” includes more than happiness, because happiness is a by-product; it actually means “God-approved” (8:17-32).

“Watching” and *“waiting”* indicates a receptive attitude (8:33-34). Such a person will not sow discord, but it eager to learn truth.

Wrong attitudes are self-destructive (8:35-36)! It does more damage to me than to anyone else. If I understand that, I would be more willing to correct bad attitudes.

Conclusion (Proverbs 9)

In Proverbs 9, Solomon personifies wisdom (9:1-12) and contrasts it with folly (9:13-18).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” (9:10). It begins almost as it ends. We are to base our wisdom upon divine revelation. There is a relationship between religion and life—happiness and satisfaction of living comes from true religion.

Questions

1. How often do we allow our tongue to get us in trouble?
2. What is our attitude towards work? Do we work while our boss is not present as hard as when he is present? (How many workers do we find working when we pass a sign that says “Men at Work”?)
3. Do we appreciate the Lord’s Prayer in John 17:20-21 for unity?

4. Is truth simple? Could one simplify Psalm 23?
5. What happens to justice when one takes a bribe? Why would he take a bribe?

Lesson 4

The Variety of Wisdom – Part I

Lesson Text: Proverbs 10-29

Introduction

In these chapters, we have a variety of proverbs that demonstrate wisdom applied to life. Much of our happiness depends upon our relationships with other people. This book is the finest to learn how to be able to relate to other people. Of course, relating to other people is simply religion from a practical standpoint. It is religion in everyday life. This book of the Bible teaches such.

“Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established” (16:3). We ought to memorize this verse. We need to place it in the hands of the Lord and leave it there. He will take care of it.

“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (27:1). James quotes this in the New Testament (James 4:13). We need to learn to live one day at a time. We do not need to bring our anticipated problems of tomorrow over to today. We should solve the problems of yesterday as far as we can solve them—what we cannot change, we need to leave there. Some of our problems come from trying to deal with yesterday’s problems added to today’s responsibilities in anticipation of what we are afraid may happen tomorrow. No person can live with that amount of load in his or her life. That will bring anyone down. If things are not as they should have been yesterday, we do what we can to correct them and then let that be gone. Then, we accept the responsibilities of today and not worry about tomorrow.

Receiving Instruction (“*The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord*”) versus Refusing Reproof

“Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish” (12:1). We ought to be interested in learning all we can and the manner that we may be able to apply the practical principles of Christianity to our lives, and out of that be a blessing to others, and in turn, they will be a blessing to us.

“He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding” (15:32). To turn our ears away from truth and teaching is to harm our own soul.

“There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord” (21:30). There is no way that we can ever oppose divine wisdom and win.

“They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them” (28:4). That means that when I turn aside from following the law and living by it, then I am actually guilty of praising wicked people that ignore and despise the law. That is a serious thing. We should think carefully

about that. Therefore, law-abiding people show that they are opposed to wicked people. They are standing in opposition to that.

“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (28:9). Solomon quotes this passage continually. God does not hear us unless we are seeking to be obedient.

“Happy is the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief” (28:14). Of course, the fear here is the fear we have been studying in the book of Proverbs.

“He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered” (28:26). Here is another familiar passage to all of us—to trust in our own heart is to walk by our own wisdom rather than by the wisdom of God.

“He, that being often reprovéd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (29:1). When we resist instruction and correction, we become hardened and continue to resist, and that can only mean that we are going to end up in ruin.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (29:18). The ASV has *“the people cast off restraint.”* Again, that is a reference to the fact that when people cast off restraint, it is because they do not see the consequences that are going to come from casting off their restraint. When people refuse to abide by the law, live in keeping with what the Bible teaches, certain consequences are going to come from that. Again, we see repetition of the idea that we are going to reap what we sow.

How to Treat Our Fellow Man versus How Not to Treat Our Fellow Man

“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins” (10:12). Here is contrast between hatred and love in associations and relationships that can turn upon these two attitudes. Nothing can contribute to ill will and hurtful relationships worse than hatred. Nothing is better for relationships than love, especially as it is set forth here. It does not ignore sins, but it is interested in seeing those sins remitted in the proper way.

“He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace” (11:12). Here is good advice.

“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself” (11:24-25). Here is liberality blessing us as well as others. The failure to be liberal tends to affect us adversely.

“He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he” (14:21). Again, here are attitudes expressed here—one attitude of despising a neighbor and another that is merciful to the poor.

“He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly” (14:29). We need to learn to weigh things and not jump to conclusions. We can go overboard sometimes when we do not have all the facts. We must be slow to jumping to conclusions.

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith” (15:17). Some great relationships existed among people that were poor. Yet, the attitude of life and principles by which they lived gave them joy and appreciation about which many with material things never know. Let us learn to develop attitudes and work on our disposition and not place material things first. Whenever material things become first in our lives, there is covetousness, greed, grasping and selfishness, which can all push away attitudes that really make life worth living. For many families, material things have become so predominant in life that it created selfishness and self-centeredness, and because of such, there was bickering and other destructive things to peace of mind and satisfaction of living. Let us learn to develop righteous attitudes to place first, so if we have lesser material things to enjoy, we will still have one another.

“Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished” (17:5). Here is an index to character. This reminds us of what Jesus said in Matthew 25:31-46. In Acts 8, Paul was persecuting the church, and in Acts 9:4, Jesus asked him, *“Why persecutest thou me?”* Thus, we need to remember this verse here.

“He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends” (17:9). Instead of passing on wrongs of which others have been guilty, love is interested in helping them correct them. That should be our attitude. To repeat something is to add difficulty to matters already bad enough.

“The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with” (17:14). This says how little things lead to bigger things—the picture is of a lake with a dam holding the water back. Just a little break in that dam and then the waters will begin to rush through. That is what contention will do—it will start out as a little thing, but it picks up momentum. Therefore, we need to avoid such.

“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (17:17). Here is real friendship. The prodigal son left his father’s home to go to a far country, and had friends as long as he had money, but not real friends, because when he found himself in adversity, he did not have any friends. We do not base real friendship upon what we can receive or get from others—it is deeper than that. The test of real friendship is when one stands by another in the midst of difficulties.

“He loveth transgression that loveth strife: and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction” (17:19). Strife leads from one transgression to another. If we have ever been involved in strife, we can know such is the case. It does not

stop with one thing, but it leads to other things. It may be that one says harsh words, bitterness and such like. It is wise for us to head it off before it develops.

“A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle” (18:19). What does one need more to say than what Solomon does in this verse? How much better it is to try to avoid disruption of fellowship and friendship, and think of the difficulty of trying to restore such. Therefore, we should be very careful.

“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (18:24). If we expect people to be friendly toward us, then we must learn to be friendly toward others. We cannot have friends when we are unfriendly. Let us learn then that our attitude toward others tends either to attract people to us or drive people away from us.

“He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again” (19:17). Again, this verse matches what Jesus said in Matthew 25:31-46.

“It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling” (20:3). Here is the importance of not dabbling in other people’s business. Christians ought not to be busybodies (II Thessalonians 3:11; I Timothy 5:13), meddling in other’s affairs. If we really want to get into trouble, just get involved in meddling in someone else’s affairs. One police officer said one time that the worst cases with which to deal are domestic cases between a husband and wife. When such is the case, he says the likelihood is great that both of them will turn on him. There is good advice—do not meddle in other’s affairs.

“He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips” (20:19). Here are people that we need to learn to avoid.

“Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee” (20:22). According to this verse, we do not try to get even with people and get back at them (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19). Let us never try to take personal vengeance into our own hands, because when we do, we will be the one that will suffer most from it.

“Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard” (21:13). Think about what Solomon says in this verse. To refuse to hear the plea of needy people means that God closes his ears to us.

“He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor” (22:9). Here is an encouragement to the attitude of liberality—Solomon mentions that throughout.

“Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him” (24:17-18). That is, when we rejoice at the calamity of others, we are bringing down the wrath of God on ourselves.

"Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work" (24:29). Again, here is the bad attitude of getting even with someone.

"Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee" (25:17). Do not overstay yourself. I once read Ann Landers when someone says, "I have a neighbor that by the time I get up, he is knocking at my door. I do not have time to cook or do anything. What can I do?" They have worn out their welcome.

"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink" (25:21). Paul quotes this verse in Romans 12:20. *"For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee"* (25:22). This is the effect. The way to change relationships is by doing good things for people. Not many people can continue to resist good things done for them. If that does not break down the heart of people and change their attitude, nothing else will. Most of the time, it will happen.

"He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears" (26:17). If we want a dog to bite us, we grab it by the ears and twist them! He does not want us pulling on his ears.

"As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?" (26:18-19). We need to be very careful about people who are always pulling jokes on somebody else. People do not like others to make them the victim of jokes. That is about what this is talking. Surely, that is something we could learn to avoid. In other words, he is making fun of people. Sometimes, people can affect family relationships when a husband or wife is always saying things to downgrade and make fun of others. Unbelievably, divorce has resulted from such situations as a contributing factor (I am sure more was involved). One wife always remarked about her little husband that he was a little man like Zacchaeus. Certainly more would become involved, but look at how serious of a matter it is. Let us learn then to be careful about what we say, particularly about making jokes.

"Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" (27:4). Sometimes when our wrath rises up, we vent it towards people. We may not stop to think about how cruel it is. Yet, that is what Solomon says. Even worse than anger is *"envy"* [*"jealousy"* – ASV]. We have in this verse wrath, anger and envy. All of these have to do with human relations. Whenever wrath is manifest towards people, we can be cruel and hurtful. Sometimes, one says things with the intention of hurting people, but whenever one does that, it always destroys good relationships. *"Anger is outrageous"*—we lose control of ourselves and say things that we wish we had not said when it is all over.

"Open rebuke is better than secret love" (27:5). That is an interesting statement. One does not appreciate love that one does not show. We should learn to express our appreciation of others. To love people with nothing said or shown in reference to that surely cannot accomplish any good. In addition, another side to that is that to ignore things that one needs to correct and is not

right is not love. “*Open rebuke is better than secret love,*” that is, trying to hide and ignore things and look the other way when things are evidently wrong. It is not helping anybody, and it is not love. Therefore, we should learn how to practice that properly.

“*Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*” (27:6). I think about the deceitful kiss of Judas when he betrayed Christ. To have a friend wound us is to help, although it may hurt. Some things are good for us, although it may hurt us. To have a friend that will help us see our mistakes, although it may not be something that we like to think about, yet at the same time, it is worthwhile to have that kind of friend.

“*Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel*” (27:9). Look how good relationships are described—it is like ointment and perfume. How much more joy is there in life, where there are good, cordial relationships. We can see the value in it.

“*He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him*” (27:14). We should not get up on Saturday morning and crank our mower up while our neighbor is sleeping. If we want to have good relationships, do not do that. Let him get his sleep on Saturday morning, and wait until about 6:30 AM before we crank it. Noisy neighbors can be a problem. It can be misery. Sometimes neighbors will even call the police for disturbing the peace. Neighbors literally despise such people. So let us learn how to be quiet around our neighbors and allow them to enjoy some sleep.

“*Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend*” (27:17). Notice an example in the New Testament of the principle in this verse (II Corinthians 7:5-6). Look at how much difference the coming of Titus made in the life of Paul under the circumstances in which he was living. Paul said that Titus became the instrument in God’s hands of bringing comfort to him. Let us learn then that we can be a blessing to other people, especially true of friends. When people are facing difficult times, bright countenance can mean a great deal. Some people have the ability to bring sunshine wherever they go. We have different talents and abilities, and all of us can have a bright countenance to brighten up situations when we find people discouraged and downhearted. Yet, some people have a special talent in doing that. They really make life easier and better for people wherever they go. They go into the hospital and visit the sick and they bring sunshine and joy with them. Whenever they leave, the patient is brighter, feels better and is encouraged, which is something that all of us should work toward and think about the good relationships such will establish by one who comes into another’s presence and brings a sense of gladness and joy and sunshine.

Questions

1. How should we get along with the folks that live around us according to Proverbs 11:12?

2. How much better is it to have turnip greens with love, peace, quietness and appreciation than T-bone steak, ice cream and cake with hatred?
3. What does Solomon convey in Proverbs 18:19?
4. What does wisdom say about our treatment of those who are poor? What does wisdom say about our treatment of those who are our friends or enemies?
5. Have we ever known somebody that always wanted to make someone else the butt of his jokes? How does that affect people?

Lesson 5

The Variety of Wisdom – Part II

Lesson Text: Proverbs 10-29

Wisdom for Husbands/Wives

“He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart” (11:29). Think about family relationships and one that is continually troubling the house. Look how Solomon describes such with the results.

“Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife” (17:1). This reminds us how important relationships are in a home compared to material things. Too many times, material things may become predominate in our lives and will tend to increase and show selfishness, and there cannot be good relationships where selfishness exists, especially in the home.

“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord” (18:22). We see the writer further expound this in Proverbs 31.

“A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping. House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the Lord” (19:13-14). Here are family relationships that are important as far as the enjoyment of life is concerned. Indeed, how truthful these are.

“It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house” (21:9). It really does not make much difference if it is a brawling woman or man. A house is not big enough for people to live in satisfaction where there is contention occurring all the time.

Wisdom for Parents/Children

“A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother” (10:1). This is so true. God has filled the Bible with illustrations of this, and has filled life with such. The way for a child to be a blessing to a parent is by using Biblical wisdom in relationship to life. The book of Proverbs emphasizes this.

“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (13:24). There is a place for discipline. One has mistreated the life that has not come to learn discipline. In fact, Dr. Spock changed his advice too late in his life. Many children who did not receive discipline in the home wished they had received such. Without it, it leaves children open to all types of things in which to get.

“He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach” (19:26). Here is admonition to young people.

“The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him” (20:7). What a tremendous influence good parents are! How much easier it is in life by paving the way and opening the door in so many ways for children who follow when their parents live the right kind of life. I could not name all the doors opened to me because of a godly father and mother. On the other hand, very often, parents close doors for young people whenever that is not true.

“Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long” (23:17). When we look at the wicked and think they are having a good time with all that they have, whatever it may be, just remember that it is not true.

“The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (29:15). This shows that there must be parental authority and discipline. God never intended for children to direct parents. Some of the real problems that developed in the past generation were that parents abdicated their responsibility and allowed children to dictate to them as to what they were going to do. The child that does not learn to submit to authority in the home will not submit to authority in the school or government, and it only becomes a problem in society as well as being a problem to the parents.

“Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul” (29:17). This verse goes with verse 15. There is the need of proper discipline and correction. Of course, this involves the matter of teaching values. It is not enough for parents just to tell a child, “You cannot do that,” and then, just because the parent has the authority, to leave it at that. We need to teach them why they cannot do it and take the time to open the Bible and say, “Here is what the Bible teaches.” This kind of correction is of value to children.

The Wise Man versus the Foolish Man

“Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour” (14:9). It is foolish for us to play with sin.

“For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counselors there is safety” (24:6). We have heard it said, “Two heads are better than one.” Proverbs 24:6 is from where it came. Sometimes we need to talk of things and get the advice of other people.

“A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished” (27:12). We need to learn to have foresight. There is a great deal of difference in being anxious about tomorrow and in not using good judgment. Sometimes we walk into problems and difficulties without taking the time to look ahead a little bit. We can avoid some of our problems with just some foresight. That is good advice.

The Wicked Man (the Immoral Woman) versus the Righteous Man

"The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh" (11:17). The consequence, blessings and the good relationships from there, as well as pleasing God, *"doeth good"* to the individual (Matthew 5:7). Yet, wrong actions bring cruelty, backfiring upon us, becoming trouble to us.

"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion" (11:22). Think about this in relationship to how Jews pictured this animal. What a vivid comparison that needs no further comment!

"A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (12:10). Sometimes the very method and manner in which we help people become cruel. It can suggest that they are unworthy and create a bad feeling in the very way we go about helping them. Thus, we need to be careful about how we try to do good things to them, because one does not appreciate the tender mercies of a cruel man.

"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself" (14:14). Here is the satisfaction that comes from a life that is doing good things. He is living the right kind of character and finds fulfillment and meaning in life.

"An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire" (16:27). Think about trying to find and dig up trash and garbage and try to use that.

"A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends" (16:28). How careful we ought to be!

"The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (16:31). One finds such a blessing in this verse!

"For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags" (23:21). Notice what he places together in this verse.

"For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief" (24:16). The just man may fall, but he does not stay there. He gets up and starts over.

"Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked" (24:19). Solomon reminds not to fret because of the wicked.

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (28:1). Here is a passage about which we ought to think. Guilt creates problems for us in that we run when there is nobody pursuing; that is, we begin to look behind, watch and wonder. For example, when Adam and Eve had sinned in the Garden of Eden, the very first thing they did was to start running because of their guilty conscience, trying to hide from God. We should examine our lives and try to build righteousness into our lives, and then we will not be

running all the time with fear. Now, think about the figure of a lion. When something comes up, a lion does not run. He is ready to stand.

Wisdom for Kings/Rulers

“When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite” (23:1-2). Solomon writes about temperance.

“For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged” (28:2). That is saying that when there is transgression in the land, there is the change of governments (“princes”). Just think about the turmoil that comes from that. On the other side, what a blessed thing it is to have people who appreciate righteousness and truth and try to abide by it.

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn” (29:2). How important it is to have the right kind of people in places of authority. The only way we can have the right kind of people in places of authority is when the people in general manifest and demonstrate righteous living. We can see the problem that has developed in our country in connection with this.

Pride versus Humility

“When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom” (11:2). Here is the contrast between attitudes of pride and humility.

“Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom” (13:10). Pride can create contention, out of which come poor relationships.

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (16:18-19). When we allow pride to dominate our lives, we may be sure that we will fail.

“By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life” (22:4). These attitudes are important.

“Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him” (26:12). Egotism and conceit create all kinds of problems.

“Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips” (27:2). This is good advice. Nobody likes a braggart or an egotistical person.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (28:13). To ignore, excuse and try to justify is to cover sins. He that is trying to hide it shall not prosper. It is not enough to confess sin, but to forsake it also is necessary. Therefore, the covering of sin and excusing of sin and ignoring of sin mean that one is without mercy.

“He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat” (28:25). Here is the contrast.

Work versus Laziness

"In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury" (14:23). When a man talks all the time, he does not have any time to work. The man that is all talk and no work ends up as Solomon describes here.

"He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster" (18:9). We should enter into our attitude toward our work in the proper way, and we should realize that to fail to do so is to be like a wasteful man.

"A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again" (19:24). That is a lazy person. I do not believe I have ever seen someone that lazy. Most are willing to feed themselves.

"The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets" (22:13). In other words, a man that is looking for excuses can always find one. That is true about excuses. One preacher in Sylacauga, Alabama, kept a little notebook of excuses that Christians would give him for being neglectful in their service. It was the most humorous thing he had, and he had about 25-30. Jesus gave a parable about excuses (Luke 14:16-24).

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man" (24:30-34). Here is a further, good description of a lazy person.

"The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason" (26:16). There is no way that we can say anything to a conceited person. He always knows more than anybody else does. We cannot teach one that already knows everything. There is a good description of it.

Wisdom about Money

"There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches" (13:7). Here are the values of life one may have, but not have much material goods. Conversely, a man may have wealth and be one of the poorest men one can find. Material things do not always bring about real riches of life, because we cannot feed the soul upon material things (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4).

"Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith" (15:16). So often, material things can become a matter of difficulty and trouble and even create trouble.

"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live" (15:27). Here is another proverb on materialism.

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (22:1). A good name is a precious thing. A good name goes with character.

“Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (23:4-5). When one bases life upon that stated in these verses, it can be gone overnight.

“A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent” (28:20). The Bible in many places warns about the danger of the desire to be rich. It affects poor people as well as people who are rich. Paul warns Christians about the same thing (I Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19).

Wisdom about Wine

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (20:1). We need to read this repeatedly in our present day. We have many unwise people in this country. We have many unwise legislators, because they allow it to be advertised everywhere.

“Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again” (23:29-35). There is the best description of an alcoholic that we will ever read anywhere. Nothing we will ever find is a more apt description of one that is under the power and influence of alcohol than that. It is worth reading and it ought to be in newspapers and shown on television every day.

Reward versus Punishment

“The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot” (10:7). Here is the influence of a good life. This shows the relationship between righteous living and other people. Here are people who remember the name of somebody because of the kind of life he lived. We could give many examples of people who have lived that kind of life and have their memory continued.

“It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom. The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted” (10:23-24). Look at the attitudes in these verses. Here is how fear affects us. So many times, the things of which we are afraid are the things that happen to us, especially when we do wrong things.

“Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house” (17:13). This statement is also in the New Testament (Galatians 6:7-10; Luke 6:36; Matthew 6:14-15).

Wisdom about the Attributes of God

“The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits” (16:1-2). That is the way for the heart to be properly prepared—through the influence of the Bible. Out of that comes the right kind of answer. When I allow the Bible to mold my attitudes and dispositions and fill my mind with the truths of it, I will know how to answer and will be able to do so. We need to learn to measure our lives, not by what we think, but by what the Bible teaches.

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (16:7). Mark this verse. When a man’s ways please the Lord, Solomon is just saying that whenever the principles of religion control a man’s life, here is the outcome. Again, it shows the effect of relationships.

Questions

1. How much easier is it in life when children have godly parents? What does Solomon say about the influence of parents?
2. What does Solomon place together in Proverbs 23:21? What lessons can this teach our children?
3. What difference do characteristics of rulers and kings make in places of authority? What does Solomon say to them?
4. How can doing something for someone else do *“good for my own soul”* (11:17)?
5. Is it possible to teach a lazy person anything?

Lesson 6

The Variety of Wisdom – Part III

Lesson Text: Proverbs 10-29

How to Use the Tongue versus How Not to Use the Tongue

“The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked” (10:11). Here, it indicates the things about which we talk. Our words can save or destroy people. This book sets such forth repeatedly.

“He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool. In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth” (10:18-20). We would do well to avoid that kind of talk—“slander” (10:18). In fact, we can talk too much. It is better to listen than to talk. Here is value of the right type of speech (10:20).

“The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh forwardness” (10:31-32). This reminds us to learn how to say and what to say. Sometimes, one can say the right things at the wrong time with all good intentions.

“An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered” (11:9). Think about damage incurred by saying things that one ought not to say, and the effect thereof.

“A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter” (11:13). Some things ought not to be discussed (secrets and things said in confidence). Whenever one does it, it can create problems.

“There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health” (12:18). We would not think about piercing someone with a sword, but words can cut deeper than a sword. They can cut to the very heart. On the other hand, the tongue of the wise is health. Therefore, my words should help people who are despondent, depressed or discouraged. By words, we can help to restore their faith, relieve their depression and give encouragement in the place of despair if we only learn how to say the right thing at the right time.

“Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad” (12:25). Maybe all we can do to help people who are bearing burdens is to offer a word of encouragement. A proper word at the right time for one burdened can be the difference between life and death. We need to study, learn and try to appropriate the principles of the Bible so we can watch for opportunities to say the right word at the right time and realize the benefit there.

“He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction” (13:3). Keeping our mouths can keep our lives by

realizing that our mouths can get us into all kinds of difficulty and trouble (Mark 7:21-23). Therefore, it becomes a revelation of our hearts. Through this means, it can get us into difficulty.

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (15:1). There are a number of examples where one can find this (i.e., I Samuel 25:1-35).

“A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit” (15:4). This is a good verse.

“A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it” (15:23). Other proverbs later will reemphasize the same thing. It is not always easy to know how to say the right thing at the right time. Sometimes, it may be better to say nothing. We need to be careful. As preachers, sometimes it is better to wait to preach on something that we need to preach until we know we can present it in the right way and manner and so the time will be such that people will be receptive to the sermon. Sometimes, preachers want to jump right into the pulpit when problems arise to deal with it. Yet, they should wait and take time to think about it and allow time for things to settle down. If done in the right time and right manner, it will always be productive of good. Yet, the right thing said at the wrong time will not accomplish good.

“The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord: but the words of the pure are pleasant words” (15:26). He contrasts how to use the tongue with how not to use the tongue here in this verse.

“The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things” (15:28). Compare this with verse 23. We should study how to answer, not just say anything that comes to mind. We should take time to think about how to answer. That is a valuable proverb.

“A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue” (17:4). This shows our own character has a great deal to do with that to which we listen and the kind of people with whom we associate. Therefore, we need to watch and develop our own character. This will help us avoid the influences of those who will lead us in the wrong direction.

“He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit” (17:27). Here is a contrast in this verse. We need to learn to talk less and listen more. Many times, we have been in similar positions. That is good advice for all of us.

“The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly” (18:8). Words wound. All throughout the book of Proverbs, Solomon emphasizes lips, words, tongue and the damage that can come from such. Thus, we should learn to be careful.

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” (18:13). It is important to be able to get the facts before we talk about something rather than listening to hearsay, because hearsay has the tendency to let things get altogether out of hand. We should learn to be careful about repeating something that we have heard, unless we know what the facts are.

Even then, it might not be wise to repeat it, but it certainly is important that we learn to investigate things and be sure about the truthfulness of it and if one needs to repeat it. Think of the foolishness and the shame if one confronts this person with the facts if he has misrepresented this totally. Suppose he try to undo the mistake he made and the false representation he set out—there is no way that he can ever undo what was done, because he did not have his facts correct. Therefore, this is worthy advice.

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” (18:21). The tongue can destroy and save. It can present the truth, preach the gospel, encourage, speak words of comfort, compassion and consolation, or on the other side, it can be destructive.

“Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles” (21:23). “Troubles” is plural. So, one of the ways to stay out of multiple troubles is to watch our tongue.

“He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend” (22:11). Even a king appreciates a pure heart. Our hearts have a great deal to do with what are on our tongues.

“Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another: Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away. A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprovèr upon an obedient ear” (25:9-12). Here again is the importance of talking with people about problems rather than someone else (25:9). Here is what will happen (25:10). Proverbs 25:11-12 is one of the finest descriptions anywhere of weighing our words and the value and preciousness of words. Here is advice about how to say things, especially when one needs to give reproof. Words need to be selective. Solomon describes the person that knows how to speak words of reproof and be effective in these verses. Everybody, including every teacher, parent and preacher needs to read these words and think about it.

“The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue” (25:23). Think about a life being like the north wind—it will just cut right through us. We try to get around behind the house somewhere out of the north wind to knock it off.

“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country” (25:25). The gospel of Christ is the good news from a far country, and that ought to be like cold water to those of us who are thirsty.

“To have respect of persons is not good: for a piece of bread that man will transgress” (28:21). Therefore, when we do not respect people, we will fail to walk by right principles, but use bribery, if it will accomplish what we think it will for us.

“A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards” (29:11). Again, this has to do with talking. We do not have to tell everything we know, and in fact, if we do so, we do not know a whole lot. That is what this passage says.

The Angry Heart versus the Merry Heart

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life” (13:12). All of us have experienced what Solomon says here. This can really have a tremendous impact upon us. Sometimes, we can help others by encouraging them in such situations.

“Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness” (14:13). Some laughter is empty, because of the inside of life and the lack of righteousness within. We could give other reasons (burdens and such like). Laughter cannot cure all types of sorrow, because some sorrow runs deeper than that.

“He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated” (14:17). Solomon describes two people in this verse. One is quick-tempered, because it leads to the saying and doing of things in the heat of passion that later is regretted. The other is one with wicked devices that everybody hates by tricking them. Here are two people who will surely not establish good relationships with people.

“A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken” (15:13). One’s countenance shows on his face. This shows the value of Christianity because of what it provides.

“A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife” (15:18). One of the best ways to avoid contention is by waiting and not speaking too hastily. Very often, in the heat of passion, if one can wait to cool down and calm down, it can avoid many difficulties. Here is a practical proverb that works.

“The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat” (15:30). What encouragement and commendation will do for us—it *“maketh the bones fat.”* We like commendation, and that is all that is saying. That is encouragement.

“Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (16:24). This is a good proverb.

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones” (17:22). This shows how our attitudes toward life have a great effect upon us physically. The mind can affect us physically (cf. Psalm 32:4). Christians ought to be happy. We have a great deal for which to be happy. In fact, we are the only people who have any real reason to be happy. We should learn that our attitudes toward life would have a tremendous effect upon us. Let us seek to develop a good disposition and a proper attitude toward life, which Christianity should do for us.

“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?” (18:14). Here is an attitude toward life that will help us bear up under infirmities. On the other side, wrong attitudes can also have an effect upon us physically. Here is good psychology—let us learn that our attitudes will have a whole lot to do with the way we are physically. Even one can overcome some

physical problems with an attitude of determination, goodwill and an optimistic outlook towards life.

"The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression" (19:11). Prudence suggests that we try to keep our tempers under control.

"A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again" (19:19). Sometimes, people, who when they refuse to profit by their mistakes, cannot be helped. One who will not learn from his errors and mistakes will always be repeating the same errors and mistakes. It is impossible to help such people. There must be personal effort on their part to make corrections.

"Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul" (22:24-25). Here is the wrong type of influence.

"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (25:28). Self-control is a vital thing as far as blessings and happiness in life are concerned.

"An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression" (29:22). Again, here is an attitude in two words—anger and fury. Watch what happens and see how many commandments they will transgress that grow out of losing control of themselves as stated here.

Miscellaneous

"Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out" (20:5). Here is the basis of counseling, psychology and psychiatry—asking the proper questions and letting people answer questions that will reveal what is on the inside. In fact, counselors operate this way. Through this means, they are able to help one understand their problem through asking questions and the answers that are given. Very often, Jesus asked questions to various ones to show that their answers are a revelation of their heart.

"The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head" (20:29). The older man does not have to demonstrate his strength physically. His beauty is his grey hair. Dagwood once was having a fit over finding a single, gray hair. Blondie said, "What in the world are you so upset about—just one gray hair?" Dagwood began looking, found one in her hair and said the same thing to her, and she just fainted! We do not need to look in the mirror and see gray hair and say that life is over. No, it is not over. It is far better to have a gray head and still be living.

"Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint" (25:19). This is a gem—have we ever had a broken tooth? Everything that touched it hurt.

Questions

1. What can we do to help people who are bearing burdens?
2. How can the keeping of my mouth keep my life (13:3)?
3. How important is it to say the right thing at the right time?
4. How would one undo the misrepresentation of another caused by hearsay?
5. Have we ever seen someone and tell by their countenance something was wrong, or that things are well? Have we met a friend on the street and realized something good happened to them?
6. Have we seen anyone that was furious? According to Solomon, what happens?
7. Have we ever seen a young man want to demonstrate his strength?

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He realized the difficulty of both poverty and riches and said he wants to be in between (30:8-9). He desired just enough. That is good wisdom.

Then, beginning in Proverbs 30:11, he mentions a list of generations, to which we may think, "How sad!"

Here is a generation that knows everything (30:12), is unwilling to listen and unwilling to admit sin. Look at what has happened today—people living in open rebellion against God and then laughing about it. Look at some of the blasphemy if we can stand it sometimes, on some of the talk shows of people who defy God in almost every way of which we can think.

Therefore, he discusses then the various attitudes of different generations. Then he mentions some things from which we ought to be able to learn, until we get down to verse 33.

Now, we may not know about churning (30:33). We may be like a little girl who came home one night and they were going to have some chocolate milk for supper. They asked the sister what she wanted, and she said, "I want some chocolate milk," and the other little girl said, "I would not drink that if I were you—I found out where they came from today." She had been studying in school that milk came from a cow. She thought it just came out of a carton. When she decided that it came from a cow, she thought it was not worth drinking. Therefore, we may not know about churning, but when we get the milk just right, put the stick in the dasher and go to work on it, it will make some butter and it will come to the top, and that is what Solomon says about wrath.

A Wise King (Proverbs 31:1-9)

Look how the book is going to end (30:1). Here was a man that is a king. We do not know who he was. Some think he may have been Solomon. Some think that he may have been a king who married an Israelite, but he was not one himself. Whatever it may have been, he had a wonderful mother.

Then she reminds him of some things that he ought to avoid (31:4-7). She told him to stay away from wine and pointed out what wine would do for him and says that the best thing he could do is to leave that alone. She showed the consequences that would come from it.

She taught him how to be the right kind of king (31:9).

A Virtuous Woman (Proverbs 31:10-31)

This book closes with a description of a worthy (KJV –"virtuous") woman. One of the greatest tributes one could ever give to any woman is in the last chapter of the book of Proverbs. Stop and think about it a little bit. When we look at the woman that the writer describes here, she is one that is industrious, takes care of her home, her husband appreciates her, and she brings honor to her family, is a blessing to her children and is a blessing in the community. Now stop and think. Take a father like the one Solomon describes in the early chapters of Proverbs and a mother as is described in the last chapter and verses

of Proverbs. Put children in a home like that, and just think about what we will have. It is almost impossible for us to think about and realize the values of it.

I cannot think of a better book for parents to sit down and read with their children than the book of Proverbs. Let the father read it and point out to his children that here are his responsibilities and here is the kind of man that he ought to be and here is the kind of man that he is trying to be. Here is what he wants to be. Read the advice to the children and point out that here is the reason that he is trying to teach them these things. Come to the last chapter and let the mother read it in the presence of the children and say to the children, "Here is what I am trying to be. Here is what I want to make my life." Just think of what that would do. Think about what it would do for young people and parents to have their children to say as these children did, "*Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her*" (Proverbs 31:28).

Favour and beauty do not make great, godly women (31:30). Indeed, that is true.

Conclusion

Again, let me suggest that we reread Proverbs. I believe it will make good family reading, or reading between husbands and wives to better their relationship. No one can take the advice given in this book, imbibe it in their life, practice it in their life and not build a happy, solid relationship in the family. It is there.

Read it and think about it in relationship to our children. If our children are away from home, if they are married and they have children, encourage them to read it and think about it for their own lives and for the good that they can do to their children. This is a wonderful book!

Notice two passages from the book of Proverbs by way of review to emphasize what Solomon says (Proverbs 3:5-6; 28:26). Now here is the beginning and end of Proverbs. There is the contrast. When one comes to the book of Ecclesiastes, he sees a man trusting in his own heart—human wisdom. This was Solomon in spite of the fact that God had given him wisdom where he could have directed his life aright.

Questions

1. What would happen to this country if we could have fathers, such as the first chapters of the book of Proverbs plead for, a wise father that will give and practice the advice that is given in those chapters and then mothers like the last verses of this last chapter, what that would do for this world?
2. Is it chance that the beginning of the book of Proverbs appeals to fathers and the end of the book appeals to mothers?
3. From this text, what things should we avoid?
4. Describe a virtuous woman.
5. Is godliness more important than favor and beauty in a woman?

Lesson 8

An Introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes

Lesson Text: Ecclesiastes

Overview

The book of Ecclesiastes is an unusual book showing how a man ignored the wisdom in the book of Proverbs and the problems that he had as a result. He could not find any meaning in life. Life was “*vanity and vexation*” (1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 16; 6:9), until he finally came to acknowledge that the only place that wisdom is found is right where one finds it in the book of Proverbs.

This book contains the various experiments that he tried to find meaning in life and see the futility of it, until he finally came to see that there is only one way that there can be any purpose in living, which is the conclusion of his sermon.

There has been considerable controversy about this book. Some have wondered why we have it in the Bible, because of the unusual nature of the book. Others have wondered what it means.

One must keep in mind some things as he studies this book.

Author

There has been controversy over who is the author of the book, though it seems that there really ought not to be any controversy about that. Some of the statements I believe surely point to the fact that Solomon is the author of the book. Yet, this is a book that, unless we get our bearings when we begin the study of it, we will be lost. We just cannot make heads or tails out of what is in this book unless we understand what it means. Therefore, we need to take a little bit of time introducing the book to help us see what this book is about and how to read and study it.

I suggest that one ought to read the first eleven chapters of First Kings, which will give some background about the life of Solomon that will help to understand some of the things that he says in the book.

We should recall that the Bible recognizes Solomon as being one of the wisest of men that have ever lived. God gave him wisdom and understanding, but as we look at the life of Solomon, we see some important things. It is not enough to have wisdom, but we must use and apply wisdom. Many of us know what is right. We know what the Bible teaches and believe that the Bible contains the wisdom from God. Yet, at the same time, we do not use and practice that wisdom.

Now, in the same way, the book of Proverbs points out how that we are to apply wisdom to all the affairs of life. Then, the book of Ecclesiastes and the life of Solomon show the tendency of man to ignore the wisdom that God has made

possible for us. God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding. Now if we read the first eleven chapter of First Kings we will see how he totally neglected the wisdom that God gave him as far as his own life was concerned and as far as the kingdom of Israel was concerned, but how true can that be of us! How easy it is for us to ignore the wisdom that is set forth in Proverbs and then live just as Solomon did by seeking after the things that he describes in Ecclesiastes, until finally, he admits that it is all folly and foolishness and comes to the right conclusion when he comes to the last chapter of the book.

Relationship of Ecclesiastes with Wisdom Literature

In addition, there is a relationship between the books of Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

In the book of Job, there is the searching question of how to understand the difficulties and suffering of life, which is the question the book of Job answers. Job and his friends tried to figure out what that was all about, and they failed completely. Then God comes on the scene, reminds them of their lack of knowledge, but even then, does not enter in to solve all the mysteries that there are about suffering.

The book of Proverbs shows the importance of wisdom and points out that *“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”* (1:7; 9:10). Only the man that accepts God and his revelation is one that is wise. We must keep that in mind.

Now, instead of Job searching and trying to find out how to understand suffering, the book of Ecclesiastes deals with a man seeking to find out some purpose in life apart from God. That is what the book means. Unless we think about it from that standpoint, we will misunderstand some of the statements made in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Helpful Cross-References

Now, there are several passages that we ought to think about that I believe can help us in understanding the book of Ecclesiastes.

“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (II Corinthians 5:7). As we read especially the early chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes, we will look at the language and see that the book of Ecclesiastes is an illustration, an example and a description of a man that is living by sight. He is living by what he can see.

- *“I saw”* (2:13, 24; 3:16; 4:7; 8:10; 9:11)
- *“I...see”* (2:3; 3:18, 22; 8:16)
- *“I have seen”* (1:14; 3:10; 5:13, 18; 6:1; 7:15; 8:9; 9:13; 10:5, 7)

Therefore, the book of Ecclesiastes gives the account of a man trying to find some meaning in life as he lives by sight. That is all that he has to go by. In so doing, he raises the questions, *“What is the purpose of life? Why am I here?”* From sight, a man will never be able to make any sense out of life. Too many conflicts and things just do not match up. That is what Solomon begins to

experiment and observe, and through this means, he is continually searching to find what life is all about. It is a total failure until he gets to the last of the book and then admits that there is only one way to see and find any meaning and purpose in life, which is to recognize divine wisdom set forth in the commandments of God (12:13). "*Fear God*" – that is exactly what Solomon said in Proverbs: "*The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*" (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). Therefore, the book of Ecclesiastes closes as it does. That is what the book of Proverbs teaches. That is not what Solomon practiced and that is not what takes place in the early part of this book.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith enables one to see what he cannot see with the eyes.

"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:16-18). Look at the two different ways of looking at life. One is to look at it by sight, as Paul said in Second Corinthians 5:7. The other is to look at it through faith—to see it through faith and therefore, through divine light. When we see life through divine light, as pictured in the book of Proverbs, then there is meaning and purpose in life. Compare Proverbs 31 of the woman that the writer described there with the early chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes and look at the difference. Surely, no one could say that she did not have any meaning in her life. Therefore, it is important then that we recognize that the early chapters, and in fact, when he gets over to the latter part of Ecclesiastes 9 and then in Ecclesiastes 10 and especially Ecclesiastes 11, the whole emphasis is on a man walking by his own wisdom and sight.

"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:13-15). That is not by divine revelation. That is not wisdom based upon what God has said. That is the kind of wisdom this world has to offer, and that is all. Look what happened: *"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work"* (James 3:16). Now if we do not believe that is true, then mark this world in its present state when it is living by its own wisdom, and see if what James says is taking place is not the same thing. We see evil and confusion in our world because men are walking by what they can see. Principles of righteousness based upon divine revelation, living in the fear of God and walking in the light of this book have nothing to do with it. Therefore, we see the problems that grow out of it. *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy"* (James 3:17). There is the other side of it. Now there is the wisdom that is set forth in the book of Proverbs—the

value, blessings and peace of mind that comes from the applied principles of wisdom in the book of Proverbs. *“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”* (James 3:18). Therefore, here then is the basis and the distinction between the book of Proverbs and the book of Ecclesiastes.

I need to mention one other thing in connection with what I introduced about walking by sight and worldly wisdom. Let us not conclude that to walk by sight and worldly wisdom means a man totally repudiates religion. Worldly wisdom can be religious. That is what Paul is writing about in First Corinthians 1:21-31. Therefore, Solomon is not writing this purely from the standpoint of an atheist—one that denies God, but rather, one that admits that there is a God and yet lives according to his own pleasure and wisdom, and has a religion that is based upon man’s wisdom rather than divine revelation. We will see that this is true, as we look further in the book (especially Ecclesiastes 5).

False Statements in Ecclesiastes

As one studies this book, he should remember that Solomon makes some statements that are not true. That does not mean that the transcribers did not report them as the one who made the statement. Yet, when he was experimenting with life and trying to find out what life meant *“under the sun,”* he was not looking above the sun. Because a man was walking by sight and not by divine revelation and wisdom, it is only natural that he makes some statements in the book that are not true to life. It is true only as a man looks at it limited by sight. Therefore, Solomon made some statements in view of this life and this world only.

Sometimes when Jehovah’s Witnesses read some of these passages, such as Ecclesiastes 3:19, they say, “Well, the Bible teaches that man dieth like a dog, so men does not have a soul, and when he is dead, he is dead like Rover—dead all over.” Well, that is neither true nor fair. It is not until we get to the last chapter of the book where the announcement is made, *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). A man dying is no different from a dog or animal dying if man was looking at life from the standpoint of all he can see without divine revelation. If this life is all that there is to life and if there is any life beyond this, we are dependant upon divine revelation to make that known. We cannot take our eyes, look out there and see anything beyond this life.

Therefore, one must keep this in mind when he reads the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon made his statement walking by sight, not by faith. Nowhere do divine revelation and the wisdom that comes from God say any such thing as that. If one does not keep this in mind, then he can end up with some things like the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Thereby, they totally pervert what is in the book of Ecclesiastes. If one is looking at things only from the standpoint of it being *“under the sun”* and the statements made in view of that, it is evident that it is not a true statement. This is just one example.

Conclusion

Now, we need to take some time and study the book of Ecclesiastes in spite of the fact that it may seem to be something that is not worth a great deal.

Solomon writes the book of Ecclesiastes from the standpoint of one walking by sight rather than by faith—things that one can see. In addition, it is well to remember that the Bible deals with two kinds of wisdom. There is the kind of wisdom in the book of Proverbs, which is the wisdom that comes down “*from above*” (James 3:17). It is wisdom one receives through revelation—the word of God. However, there is also wisdom that Paul calls “*the wisdom of this world*” (I Corinthians 1:20; 3:19). It is sometimes spoken of as “*fleshly wisdom*” (II Corinthians 1:12), that is, a man walks by sight and lives according to the desires of his flesh. His body dominates and controls what he does; it does not matter what the Bible says.

So one must keep that in mind as he studies the book of Ecclesiastes, because Solomon uses the word “*wisdom*” in the book of Ecclesiastes, but he does so generally in reference to “*the wisdom of this world*” or “*fleshly wisdom*” rather than the kind of wisdom that is in the book of Proverbs. If one fails to keep that in mind, he will really misunderstand what the book of Ecclesiastes is trying to say.

Now, we can see why a book as this would be in the Bible. Think of the number of people living today that would not deny God, and yet at the same time, they are living as though there is no such thing as the Bible.

Let me suggest something—let us make a mark in our Bible so that this will help us in the study of the book of Ecclesiastes itself. Mark at the end of Ecclesiastes 11:8. All that we will be studying down through Ecclesiastes 11:8 will be based upon a man looking at life “*under the sun*,” walking by sight. It is not until we come to Ecclesiastes 11:9 that he makes the transition. Then we are moving toward the conclusion that he will draw in Ecclesiastes 12. Therefore, the things we will read in the chapters beginning from Ecclesiastes 1-11:8 all will be in the framework and the context of what I have been discussing. When we come across the word “*wisdom*,” just keep in mind that he is writing about worldly wisdom. It does not necessarily mean the wisdom that we studied in Proverbs, but he is trying to find some way to approach life from “*the wisdom of this world*,” and he is offering every kind of experiment and all kinds of advice. Then when he gets through with all of it, he finally comes back and says that he tried this and that, and it still left life empty. Not until we get down to Ecclesiastes 11:9 does he come to the point where the emphasis changes.

Questions

1. What question does Solomon answer through the book of Ecclesiastes?
2. What are some phrases that we continually find throughout the book?
3. Does the possession of wisdom guarantee that the owner will always follow such? How does that apply to us?

4. What are the two different ways of looking at life, or the two different kinds of wisdom? Which does Solomon use in the beginning of the book and which does he use at the end of the book? What is his conclusion?
5. Could anyone say of the woman described in Proverbs 31 that her life was without meaning and that it had no purpose?
6. What evil works are not one engaged in now and how much confusion exists in our present world? Why does such take place?
7. Is one who walks by worldly wisdom always an atheist?
8. Does Solomon record false statements in this book? How are we to view them?
9. If we had no Bible and no divine revelation, and a man was just looking at it from the standpoint of all he can see, what is the difference in a man dying and an animal dying?

Lesson 9

The Emptiness of Life without Divine Wisdom

Lesson Text: Ecclesiastes 1

Introduction

We ought to remember that Solomon had the opportunity to make all the experiments of life one can make without God to try to find satisfaction in life.

I am not very smart if I think that some experiments in life exist today in which Solomon did not engage to try to find satisfaction, and that I will succeed where Solomon failed. That is foolish! Yet, too many of us perhaps think that way and sometimes try to live that way.

“Vanity of Vanities” (1:1-2)

Look at the word “*vanity*” he uses here. He uses the phrase “*vanity of vanities*” twice. Therefore, we see a connotation of the word “*vanity*” five times in verse 2.

The word “*vanity*” means “emptiness, that which is soon passing and not going to last long.” We will find the word “*vanity*” thirty-seven times in twenty-nine verses in this book. Another interesting phrase Solomon uses in this book to convey this same sentiment is “*vexation of spirit*,” which he uses ten times beginning with verse 14.

Therefore, the idea in the book is this—how can one find something that will give fullness, satisfaction and meaning to life? He raises the question in the next verse.

“Under the Sun” (1:3)

Mark the phrase “*under the sun*.” He did not say “above the sun,” but “*under the sun*,” showing his limited outlook. When a man walks by sight, his outlook is limited. He cannot see beyond this world. In fact, he cannot see beyond tomorrow when he walks by sight. Faith is the only thing that enables us to see the unseen (II Corinthians 4:16-18; Hebrews 11:1).

Therefore, he raises this question—“*What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?*” Now, look at life as he sees it purely from the standpoint of sight.

The View of Life without Faith (1:4-11)

If we look at sight, we see just one generation after another passing off the scene (1:4). Well, consider man just passing one generation after another with the material universe still standing here. We cannot make any sense out of that, if that is all there is to life. There could not be anything but pessimism. We

could not find any satisfaction in life if we just watch one generation after another come and pass off the scene, knowing that we are going to be included in that number. There is not any way. Yet, many people are searching to try to find some satisfaction in life by doing it that way. That is all they have.

Here is nature (1:5-7). Let a man look at nature apart from God and find some meaning in life. Here is a scientist. Just consider the fact that men today are trying to get rid of God. They are trying to find some means of offering satisfaction unto man, and the more they try, the greater dissatisfaction exists among men. Look at the difference now in how one looks at nature without God and how one looks at nature with God (cf. Psalm 19:1-6). No evolutionist will ever look at the stars and the firmament and see God in relation to it all! All he sees is nature. Now then, I would like to see an evolutionist try to make some sense out of the multiplied problems of life. He cannot make sense out of it, because there is no sense to it! If I came from a monkey and I am going back to the grave, somebody tell me what life is all about. Well, there is just not any way. Then, even having mentioned the fact of nature, the Psalmist in Psalm 19 does not stop there, because nature is insufficient. Therefore, he did not stop with nature. The universe is the glory of God only as a man accepts divine revelation. Psalm 19 does not just describe the universe: "*The heavens declare the glory of God*" only to the man who believes this book. Therefore, the Psalmist continued in Psalm 19:7-14. The difference then between a scientist that does not know or accept God and one that accepts God, made known through the Bible, is divine wisdom. I would just like to have some evolutionist go into a hospital, go down the hall into each room, one by one, and announce to everybody in the hospital, especially those with terminal cases, "I am here to tell everyone there is no God, and I want everyone to lift up their eyes and rejoice!" Yet, that is what our world is like today and that is into what evolutionists are trying to turn our world. They do not want the Bible even read in a classroom. They do not want even prayer that would recognize God acknowledged in the classroom, which is humanism. They say that they are really going to make the world a place to live. Yes—look at what they have done with it! We will see what he has to say about that. Here we have then life without divine wisdom turns into something that is boring.

There is sight (1:8). Just look, look, look, and see how much we can see with the eye that brings satisfaction and fullness to life. We cannot feed the inside like that. We can feed the body. The rich man took care of the body, but there was the restlessness that characterized his life (Luke 12:18). Therefore, that is characteristic of life.

Therefore, here it is—"no new thing under the sun" (1:9). Now, that is not to say that there are not any new inventions. Suppose that when it comes to life, we have all kinds of new inventions. He is not saying that there is no such thing as new inventions, but when it comes to life, what is there new under the sun that can offer any satisfaction for living that a man had not been through? Somebody says, "Oh, but we have automobiles and airplanes!" Yes, but

Solomon had chariots with wheels that rode just like ours do. Things like that are not going to give us any satisfaction if that is all there is to life. In fact, I know a person who is trying to find satisfaction in life from things. That is all for what she lives. God does not mean anything. Yet, there is restlessness, lack of satisfaction, running here and there, always grabbing and grasping for things as though these are going to provide some satisfaction—always on the move and on the go. That is all life is to her, but we can see the absence of any purpose in life. Therefore, that is what Solomon said.

Therefore, what this person is going through with is not at all different from what Solomon and multitudes of others have already tried, and it will not work (1:10).

Well, if we just live by sight, there is not any value in the past or future (1:11).

The King Who Experimented (1:12-18)

I believe this identifies the book with Solomon, especially with the first verse (1:1, 12). Therefore, I do not believe that could apply to anybody else except Solomon.

The word “*heart*” (1:13) indicates the inward, subjective wisdom by which he is living, not divine revelation—the unveiling of the mind of God—but rather that comes out of his own heart and mind. Yet, that is a great deal different than in seeing that wisdom that God gave Solomon in the very beginning, and now then, the kind of wisdom that he is writing about when he is going to use that out of his own experience.

Note the word “*experience*” (1:16). “*Experience*” has to do with subjective directions and thought. Revelation is objective; it is on the outside, not on the inside. It is directed from the outside to my mind. Here is a man that is seeking wisdom through experience, which is “situation ethics.” Just live for the moment.

Therefore, this helps us see what Solomon’s problem was (1:17). Whenever I decide that I am going to do just what I want to do, let my heart and mind direct me, then I will confront the same problems that Solomon did. Everyone else who has tried it has found the same thing.

Now, keep in mind that the wisdom that he is writing about is not the wisdom of the book of Proverbs (1:18). This is human wisdom. Now if one does not believe that in much wisdom is much grief, let me illustrate it. Think about the atom bomb. It came about by much wisdom. The world was in turmoil because they could not decide what to do with it. They are not going to decide. There is no way, because they are not going to turn to divine revelation and allow the wisdom of God to mold the characters of men so that they can keep that in control. Consider also the fact that the Middle East now has chemical warfare. Russia developed some years ago, and we have some and might make more. Unless we have men influenced by divine wisdom to control these things, it is purely nothing but grief and sorrow. Now, we can just name it—the wisdom

of this world simply brings about grief and sorrow. Look at all the education that we have today—all the higher degrees of learning. Take every one of them, pile them all in a pile and throw the Bible away, and I will guarantee that all in the world that it will do is to have multiplied problems. That is all that it will be. It will be sorrow and heartache. They will not solve one thing—just no way. That is the reason I said that this book that seems to be strange has more information in it than we think about. Solomon said to get out and learn all one can. Now let me suggest that we are on our way to doing it—let us just go ahead and kick the Bible out—teach nothing but math, biology, English and such like, and then see what is the product of that. We have not known any grief or sorrow yet as to what we would have. We are playing with fire and destruction all because we think that we know something, we are smarter than God is and that we do not need the Bible. We need to teach our young people—if they throw away the Bible, learn all they can and then it will bring them nothing but sorrow and grief. That will be its product. Now, if that is what we want, then we are on our way to having that whenever we decide that we do not want God. Young people need to remember that when they are studying some of this stuff in school that denies and rejects God, that if they swallow that and cause them to turn from the Bible, they are only opening the door to heartache, sorrow and grief. There is just no way to avoid that. We already have it laid down here for us. It is folly for us to think that it will happen to us.

Questions

1. Where can we find fullness, satisfaction and meaning to life? Where did Solomon initially think he could find such?
2. According to Ecclesiastes 1:4-11, what do we see if we look at life only through sight?
3. How can we make any sense out of life without faith?
4. How many people are searching to try to find some satisfaction in life by living without faith?
5. As we read Ecclesiastes 1, can we not see the emptiness in the lives of multitudes today?
6. What satisfaction can science offer to life if we have forgotten God?
7. What unbelieving, atheistic scientist will ever look at the stars and the firmament and see God in relation to it all?
8. How long would doctors even let an evolutionist stay in a hospital if all he had to proclaim to the patients is to rejoice over the fact that there is no God? How much sense would that make?
9. What do new inventions have to do with offering satisfaction to life? Who in the world would think that he could find fullness of life in an automobile?
10. If we just live by sight, what value is there in the past or future?
11. If the atom bomb came about by much wisdom, then is there not much grief over it? Of what value is this going to be?

Lesson 10

The Experimentation of Life without Divine Wisdom

Lesson Text: Ecclesiastes 2-4

Introduction

Solomon tried the matter of learning in Ecclesiastes 1, and he found out that it would not work. Therefore, he states his lack of satisfaction in its vanity and gives it another go.

Pleasures (2:1-3)

His learning (human wisdom) did not bring satisfaction. Therefore, he partied a little while. He wanted to look for some pleasure, and he gave himself to it.

Therefore, everyday about 4 PM, he would go to happy hour, try that out a little while and see how that would work out. Now if we just listen to the ads on TV and radio, that is all we hear—"Happy hour! Happy hour!" However, that did not satisfy him.

Possessions (2:4-11)

He tried his pleasure, and that did not work out, so he became a workaholic and worked himself to death to look at what he built—his handiwork.

Now, if we go back and read First Kings 7:1, Solomon's men took thirteen years to build his house with all of the things that he had in it. Therefore, he engaged in work and built houses, gardens, farms, orchards and swimming pools. He got servants and great possessions, silver and gold (2:8), peculiar treasures of kings (I guess that is antiques), men singers as entertainment, and delights of the sons of men and increased these more and more.

So here it is—pleasure and material possessions.

Problems of His Labors (2:12-26)

He said that he had all of this and would not be able to keep it, because it would not last (2:12).

He said that it looks to him with the gambit of all these things that wisdom has something to commend it (2:13). The man that lives only for this world, its possessions and its entertainment will gather all the wisdom that he can to enable him to gather all these things and possessions and all the entertainment in which he can engage (2:14). On one side, a man is a fool who does not have anything. Now, walking by sight, Solomon thought that the wise man is not any better than the fool is, and he is right, if that is all that there is to life. Therefore,

he says that he cannot make any sense out of that. The man that wastes his time and does not do anything ends up with nothing. The man that spends all of his time and gains all that he can, but lives only for this life, ends up just exactly like the man who did not do anything. That is exactly what the Bible says (cf. I Timothy 6:7). The fool and the wise man end up exactly alike as far as possessions and things of this world are concerned. If we look at wisdom only from the standpoint of this life, indeed, it does not pay.

Solomon said that he was not any better off than the fool was, with all that he had (2:15-16). According to Second Kings 11, Solomon really was not any better off than the fool was; he just had more problems and that was all.

Underscore "*I hated life*" (2:17). He is writing about the wearisome toil. Now man that lives only for this life will never be able to find full satisfaction in his work. Let a man take divine revelation—the light of God—and it throws altogether a different light upon what work is all about. Paul said that he "*coveted no man's silver or gold*" and that had labored with his own hands so that he might help those who are weak (Acts 20:33-35). He said that he found out that there was purpose in life in working to have something to give to help others, in which is joy (cf. Ephesians 4:28). So the man that lives under the light of divine revelation, realizes this world is not all there is and allows the word of God to mold and influence him has a purpose even on his job that a worldly man cannot have, because he has to be shifting from pillar to post to try to find some kind of satisfaction in it. That is the reason the Bible points out that even in the first century, people who were slaves could find purpose and meaning in life, although they were in that position, because Christianity threw a different light on why man lived and worked.

If we just think about today, people who hate life are unsatisfied (2:18). We are just working to pile up and then think about who is going to get it. I have to leave it all behind. Solomon said that he hated that. However, the man that works in order that he might do well and understands what life is all about is putting treasures in heaven and does not leave it all behind. The man that works to put his treasures up there, when he dies, does not bid goodbye to all of it. He will be able to enjoy it throughout eternity. That is not so with a man who lives by limited desire and does not see what the purpose of life is. Now look at the difference between the way that his life is described here as compared with that of David (cf. Acts 13:36). David lived with purpose, and his life had meaning. Solomon is now living, looking at life from the other standpoint, and there is not anything worthwhile that he can find in life. Think about the people today whose lives have no meaning at all, but that is not all.

Psalms 49:10-14 is an apt description of what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 2:19. Therefore, when a man lives only for the things of this life, he leaves it to somebody else. He does not know what they are going to do with it. It may well have been that Solomon had Rehoboam in mind whenever he made this statement, because certainly, Rehoboam fit in with what he described here.

He writes about despair (2:20). That is the outlook of life that people have who ignore God and never think about anything above the sun, who are not guided by revelation and live only for things of this world.

We can just think about the restlessness of people who build their lives on pleasure and things that have to do with time (2:21-26). No wonder Jesus said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matthew 11:28-30).

Pattern of the Emptiness of Life without Divine Wisdom (3:1-15)

Now, if we do not remember the purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes, we will not appreciate what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Many have often quoted these verses as though they were teaching something that is a reality and by which a man is to build his life. What these verses are really saying is that when a man lives without any relationship or any knowledge and understanding of God, life is simply up and down. It does not make sense.

In Ecclesiastes 3:9, we will see that this is what he is describing—a reference to those things he said in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Here are the changes in life that are taking place. A man that is living by worldly wisdom cannot make any sense out of life! Things are beyond his control—he may be up today and down tomorrow. These verses simply describe the changes that take place in life. The man that lives without any recognition of God has no understanding or explanation of them—they just do not make sense. Now to a Christian who recognizes God, he can see purpose in relationship to all the things he mentioned there. Yet, Solomon is not writing this from the standpoint of a man who has divine wisdom and recognizes God, but he is writing from the standpoint of a man that is living *“under the sun”* and ignores God. Therefore, he cannot make any sense out of the things that are taking place in life. It just has no purpose.

The ASV translates *“the world”* as *“eternity,”* and in fact, the KJV translates the same Hebrew word found in Ecclesiastes 3:14 as *“for ever.”* Well, I believe that the KJV may at least have a point in view of what the book of Ecclesiastes means. Therefore, man allows the world to control and direct him through its appeal. That may be about what he is writing. On the other side, it may well be that the ASV is right when it translates Solomon saying, *“he hath set eternity in his heart.”* If that is the sense, then the point is this—that being true, there is a continual restlessness on the part of man, searching to try to find some meaning in life that cannot be found without recognizing God, the future and the world beyond. That may well be the idea that is in the passage, since everywhere else we find this Hebrew word, it is translated *“forever,”* *“everlasting,”* *“eternity”* or some such word. If that is the case, then, of course, the idea is that God intended to show something in us that keeps us from being

satisfied with what this world has to offer. God made us that way. Having done so, we cannot take the things of the world to feed and satisfy our hearts.

Partiality in Judgment (3:16-17)

Now, we look out in the world and see that is true. Look at the judgments of courts of the land. Where we see righteousness, we also see iniquity. The world has mixed things up. Very often, even in the matter where there are courts, judges are not rendering justice. Bribery and many other things may enter into judgment.

Therefore, if this life is all that there is, we will never fully mete out justice. There must be something beyond in this life if we ever mete out justice.

Physical Aspect of Life without Divine Wisdom (3:18-22)

Many very often misapply this passage. I believe several things are in connection with this. Whenever men lay aside divine revelation and live by their own wisdom, they live as beasts. When the body—the animal appetites—control us, we then live on the level that is common with beasts.

Genesis 2 shows that there are some things common between man and beasts:

- We have a physical body.
- We live in the same kind of environment as far as the world is concerned.
- We breathe the same air.

Now, if that is all that there is to man, then he is not anything more than a beast. Thus, whenever men refuse to recognize that they are more than beasts, they will live as beasts. In Romans 1:18-32, we have a picture of men living just as beasts. They refused to recognize the wisdom of God, turned aside and lived by their own wisdom and their own fleshly appetites. Three times, Paul said, “*God gave them up*” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). There is a picture of man as he tried to live by his own wisdom. Now it is in that connection that Solomon states the next verses.

Ecclesiastes 3:19 is a passage that Jehovah’s Witnesses like to read. When they do so, they tell somebody, “Well, man does not have a soul. He is just like an animal. When he dies, that is the end of him.” Man does not have a soul seen only by man’s wisdom. That is what the passage says. Solomon was looking at things “*under the sun.*” He was not looking at things above the sun. He was describing things based upon human wisdom. When Jehovah’s Witnesses say that when a man is dead, he is dead just as an animal, they base that upon human wisdom, which is a denial of divine revelation. Now that is why I said that we should understand what the book of Ecclesiastes means. If we have ever talked with a Jehovah’s Witness, and they pull this passage on us, if we do not know what the book of Ecclesiastes is about and how it is written, we will have a

difficulty in answering them on this passage, because he will read it and say, "Here it is right here. Your Bible says that when a man dies, he is just like a beast." The reason is that Solomon reported this while trying to live without divine light. That is the reason he reported it. The Bible does not contain this statement because it teaches that all there is to man is his body or his breath. It says that whenever I look purely from the human standpoint and sight, I cannot see my spirit or soul. Therefore, when I quit breathing, I am dead. For example, we have Fido. Suppose he quits breathing the same day I do, and as some, we have two funerals—we have one for Fido in which we get a casket for him, and we get a casket for me. There is no difference between Fido and me if all we can see now is just by sight and human wisdom. Now that is what this passage is saying. Solomon is saying that when we see life only from the standpoint of what we can see with our own eyes, not from the standpoint of what the Bible enables us to understand about men, then it seems as though man is just as a beast. Now that is the standpoint from what this passage is saying. We will come across another passage later that will say the same thing.

The way the KJV translates Ecclesiastes 3:21 is a little bit misleading. He is not really saying in the passage that the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of beast goes downward. That is not what he is saying. He is saying that from the standpoint of human wisdom, we do not know whether the man's spirit went one way and the animal spirit went another way. If by human sight without a Bible, I died and a dog died, they buried both of us, they would not know which way the inside of us went—they would not know whether I went up and the dog went down. Well, now that is what that verse is saying. From a human standpoint, we cannot tell. Now, that is not to say that the Bible does not enable us to know the difference. Oh yes, it does! Yet, the book of Ecclesiastes, from the standpoint in which Solomon is discussing it and the principles that we find in it until we get over to the end of the book, will not enable me to know that.

Now then, if a man lives only for this life and he is as a beast, then Ecclesiastes 3:22 is the conclusion. So, if I cannot see beyond this life, and there is not anything beyond this life, then let me live to enjoy what I can out of my work here—that is my portion. From the standpoint of human wisdom, I do not see anything after that. I am in the dark, and that is what that passage is saying.

Pain of the Emptiness of Life without Divine Wisdom (4:1-3)

Then he looked around the world, saw oppression and tears and found no comfort. Because of that, he says, "*Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive*" (4:2).

Now if we just look out at the tragedy in the world, the sorrows and the heartaches through which many are going, then the conclusion would be that a dead man is better off than the man who is living, and many people come to that conclusion in life. Years ago, in the newspaper, I saw where two teenagers out

in Texas took their lives. In other words, they looked out in the world and said that dead people are better off than people who are living. Therefore, if we look at it only from this standpoint, and they were looking at it that way, then we will come to the same conclusion.

Solomon said if we are going to consider it all the way around, it is better never to have been born. The one that has never seen the light of day is better off than anybody that has lived, or the dead, either. Life, surely, has not meant that much to one who thinks that is all there is to life.

Possessions Revisited (4:4-12)

Then he begins to look at life and says that here is a man that gets out and engages in good works and rightful activities. He gets out and does a good job. Yet, his neighbor envies him for what he is doing. He does not come up, encourage him and say, "Well, that is good what you are doing." Again, this is what happens if we look at it only from that standpoint. Then he describes the fool that folds his hands together and eats his own flesh (4:5), that is, he lives by his own wisdom and that is all that he has.

Again, he sees this only in the light of human wisdom. Let us not read these verses and place them in the context of this being divine advice. Now it is true, sometimes, that in Proverbs, which we have already studied, we have seen that it is better to have a little and to serve God than it is to have a whole lot, but we must keep in mind the standpoint from which Solomon is discussing this.

Again, we can see the wealth and the emphasis that he places upon material things. He further describes some situations in connection with that.

Politics (4:13-16)

He considers the matter of politics. We can pretty well see Solomon in that, but he is looking at life from the standpoint of having obtained a crown. Now, suppose that this world is all that there is. Look what happened to President Nixon. Think about the ambition that comes if a man is just living for this life and only this life. Notice what happens.

Therefore, there is not any value in that as far as satisfaction in life is concerned.

Questions

1. Do pleasures bring lasting satisfaction and fulfillment? What did Solomon say about such?
2. According to Ecclesiastes 2:14, does wisdom pay?
3. How much difference does it make between the one putting treasures in heaven and the other who frets about who will receive his possessions after his death? What does one who leaves it all behind have left?
4. How can a man that is living by worldly wisdom make any sense out of life?

5. To what purpose are the things that Solomon described in Ecclesiastes 3:1-9?
6. Why does the Bible say that when men die, they are as beasts in Ecclesiastes 3:19? What is the difference between the death of Fido and me if all there is to life is what we see by sight?
7. If all we have is human wisdom, when a man dies and a beast dies, who knows whether the man's spirit went one way and the animal spirit went another way? If by human sight without a Bible, a dog and I died, and they buried us both, which way did the inside of us go? Did I go up and did the dog go down?
8. From the context of Ecclesiastes 3:18-22, what will there be after our life and labors?
9. According to Ecclesiastes 4:1-2, why do some commit suicide?
10. According to Ecclesiastes 4:4, what does a man get for the labor of his possessions?
11. How much does one get from a crown? Of what value, joy and satisfaction can there come from that?

Lesson 11

The Extraneous View of Life without Divine Wisdom

Lesson Text: Ecclesiastes 5-8

The Religious “*Wisdom of This World*” (5:1-7)

Now I mentioned earlier in the introduction that there is such a thing as “*the wisdom of this world*” that is religious. When Paul wrote the Corinthian letter, he directed it against the Judaizing teachers who were causing trouble in the church at Corinth, and “*the wisdom of this world*” described in First Corinthians 1:20 is related directly to the teaching and preaching of the Judaizing teachers. In Second Corinthians 11:12-15, he describes them in a different way. He said that they are “*false apostles*” who transformed “*themselves into angels of Christ.*” These people live by worldly wisdom.

There is such a thing then as a worldly, religious person guided by worldly wisdom. He will not want to cast off all restraint. In fact, all men are religious in some way. Humanism and evolution are religions. Men do not live without some kind of religion. Here is a man with worldly wisdom—here is a description of his religion.

We have any number of examples of that. For example, in Mark 10:17-22, there is an indication of the emptiness in the rich, young ruler’s life. When Jesus said to keep the law, he said, “*All these have I kept from my youth up.*” Yet, when Jesus said to go sell what he has and give to the poor and follow him, he turned away sorrowful because his religion was a religion of the world, controlled by material benefits and aspirations. He was a man of great possessions. Thus, there was a man with a worldly religion. He was not irreligious. Solomon is now writing about that kind of religion here. Looking at religion at that standpoint from perspective of the rich, young ruler, we will not see any satisfaction in that at all. Whenever a man turns out to be religious based upon worldly principles, there is no satisfaction in it, because it is not looking to final and eternal things.

Solomon is writing here about praying (5:2). In Matthew 6:5, when the Pharisees prayed, they were rash with their mouths—they said rash prayers. They were praying for men to see them, which was folly. They were praying by human wisdom; they were not praying by divine light and according to divine revelation. Jesus said that when they prayed for men to see them, they have their reward. Their men have listened to them and said, “*Look at that pious fellow!*” That is all they are ever going to get. Therefore, from that standpoint, he is warning against such.

Therefore, religion becomes a commercial matter—it becomes a financial thing (5:3). If we read Matthew 23:14, we will see that while the scribes and

Pharisees made long prayer for pretense, they robbed widows. In Matthew 21:12-13, when Jesus went into the temple where they were buying and selling, he turned over the tables and drove them out of the temple. Now, the kind of religion that is under consideration here is this. Their mind was preoccupied with worldly things, and being preoccupied, they went through a form of religion, which left them with no kind of satisfaction. Yet, that was a religion in relation to the world—it was not a religion in relation to God and the Bible, and we need to learn that. We may be religious, not because we have knowledge of the fact that we are sinful, that we need God's help for salvation and we want to follow the way that God has given us in the Bible. Now if our religion is not based upon the facts that we are conscious of our unworthiness and our need of God and we are interested in pleasing God and walking by divine light, it will be a religion that brings no kind of satisfaction. It is worthless, and there is a great deal of that kind of religion.

He writes about fear of our God (5:7). Now the kind of fear that he mentioned in Proverbs 1:7 is not this. This is a fear such as we find in Matthew 25:24-25 with the man with one talent. He took his talent, hid it and whenever his lord questioned him about it, he said, *"I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine."* That is a religion based purely upon fear. There is no satisfaction in that kind of religion—one who is afraid that God is going to jump down his throat at every move he makes. I remember as a boy walking close to a cemetery and I thought a bogeyman would jump from behind every bush. Well, I was not satisfied walking around there, and sometimes we can think about God that way, as though he is behind every bush and he is just ready to jump out and grab us. Well, that is to misunderstand him. That is the religion from the standpoint of the world. The Bible does not reveal that religion. Therefore, here is the importance of avoiding that.

The Effects of the Religious "Wisdom of This World" (5:8-8:17)

Then again, he mentions oppression and the perversion of judgment (5:8).

Therefore, it does not matter if the man is a king (5:9). He has to eat just as a poor man. He is dependant upon the wheat that grows and makes bread. The man that has a crown on his head is not any better as far as what he can eat, and in fact, the amount of it. He may have a little bit more and stuff himself a little bit more, but that would be all.

Thus, it calls for more and more (5:10). In Luke 12:16-21, the rich man had his barns full. He said that he would tear them down to build greater barns. The things of the world satisfy in that way—it always calls for more and more and more and more, never offering any kind of satisfaction.

Now, just think about looking at life from that standpoint (5:11-6:12). That is about as gloomy as we can get. Life is dark—never sees anything good, like the woman whom somebody asked how she was doing. She said, “I would feel pretty good, but I know I am not going to feel good tomorrow, and so I do not feel too good today.” We look at life that way sometimes when we think about it only from the standpoint of earth. We cannot enjoy today because we are afraid we will feel bad tomorrow. If that is all there is to life, it is just a gloomy way at looking at life. Therefore, these chapters show the folly of a man trying to live and find satisfaction and ignore God.

In Ecclesiastes 7, he is giving advice in relationship to human wisdom, and again, that is important to keep this in mind as we read the book of Ecclesiastes, or else, we will misunderstand some of the statements that he makes. Human wisdom has some value in it. Some things are worthwhile as far as human wisdom is concerned, but there are limitations to it. Therefore, it depends upon the standpoint from which one gives the advice. Now in Ecclesiastes 7, the emphasis is to be careful and not to overdo anything.

He writes about mourning, laughter, and so on (7:3). Here are the things that balance life. Yet, look at the statement, “*Sorrow is better than laughter.*” That is a complete denial of what we have already studied in the book of Proverbs, when it deals with laughter or joy being good medicine (cf. Proverbs 17:22). Therefore, we can see that he bases this upon the standpoint of looking at it from human wisdom.

If we look at life from the standpoint of human wisdom, then it looks as if God made it crooked (7:12-13). It is only when we see life lighted by divine revelation that we can understand what otherwise seems to be the crooked things of life. We cannot understand them any other way.

Now we see there is the balance that he suggests in Ecclesiastes 7:14, which is really a key verse in the study of Ecclesiastes 7.

Here is his sight in Ecclesiastes 7:15—walking by sight instead of by faith.

It gets back to the verse I read earlier. He said just to be careful and do not overdo anything (cf. 7:16). Well, there is value and balance from the standpoint of human wisdom. That helps some as far as the world is concerned—a man just is going to live here in this world, if there is no afterlife. There would be some value in a man not overdoing anything. Therefore, it is from that standpoint that he lives life.

Well, it seems that Solomon suggests that it is all right to be a little bit wicked (cf. 7:17). We just are not to overdo it. Now the reason he is saying not to be over wicked is that if we are, then we are likely not to live out our days in this world. We will cut our life short. If that is all there is to life, then we should avoid being overly wicked, because we will not have time to enjoy life that much. We can tell a man that in reference to drinking, even from a worldly standpoint: “Do not do that. If that is all there is to this life, do not cut your life short by drinking. Lengthen your days out so you can have as much time as possible to enjoy this life.”

In his search for human understanding and sight to try to find out the answers to the problems, he admits that he is a failure (7:23).

The vicissitudes of life and the circumstances of life that we are confronted with just cannot be solved by our wisdom and understanding (7:24).

So he said by human reason that he tried to find out what life is all about and what is best in life, and he admits the difficulty in doing so (7:25).

Therefore, he said he sought it, but he cannot find it—it is just not there (7:28).

Here is a picture of man then without God (7:29). God made him. The man that wrote the book of Ecclesiastes is not denying that there is a God, but he is trying to find out how man can live without God, made known through divine revelation.

Now he deals with the explanation of worldly wisdom (8:1). From a worldly standpoint, there is some value in it. Now, he is going to give some discussion as to the argument that he has made for life being vanity.

He writes now that the thing to do is to obey the king's command (8:2). So in order to get along with the king, we just are obedient to him (8:3-5).

Again, we can see where he calls attention to the fact that he is walking by sight (8:6-9).

Therefore, the idea is to watch to lengthen our days (8:10-13). That is the reason that he suggests it.

Therefore, he said the same thing is happening to the wicked man that happens to the righteous man, and he said that when he began to try to figure all of that out, life seems to him just to be an empty thing (8:14). He cannot make heads or tails out of it. He cannot make sense out of it. Of course, that is true.

Therefore, he said just to be happy now (8:15). Thus, there is his philosophy. Now as we look at it, the same thing happens to the wicked as it does to the righteous. For example, righteous people get sick just like wicked people do. We live in a world by which common things affect all of us—famines and hardships do not pass up the righteous just because they are righteous. They affect the righteous and wicked alike. Now then, looking at it from that standpoint, he said that the thing to do is to eat, drink and be merry. That is, get all one can out of life, because that is all that there is to life. So that is the philosophy of a man that walks by sight and lives as though this world was all that there is for a man, that there is nothing beyond. Multitudes are living today as though there is no such thing as eternity or judgment or anything beyond this life, because they are following the very wisdom that is set forth here. When we see life only in relationship to this life alone, there is not any difference between men. Now, an example of this is in Luke 16:19-31. Jesus gives a story of two men—a rich man and a poor man. Now suppose that in the story that Luke records, Jesus did not say anything and give any indication about what life is like after death and beyond this life. If we just blot out any future life, the difference between the rich man and Lazarus is that the rich man had the best of it. He lived for the things of now, but let Jesus throw some light on the

other side of it. They both died. It is different now. Here is the rich man in torment and Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. Because revelation has opened and enabled us to see these people beyond death, in life after this, that makes a great deal of difference. So Luke 16 warns against the idea of eating, drinking and being merry, because it adds an element that shows life beyond this. If life were limited to the time that we spend here, then there would be no point in the story that Jesus gave.

So there it is from an earthly standpoint (8:16).

The conclusion of that is in Ecclesiastes 8:17. Whenever a man tries to make sense out of life, seen only from a human standpoint and from human understanding, it does not make sense!

Questions

1. Why did the rich, young ruler turn away sorrowful in response by Jesus to his question of eternal life? What kind of satisfaction is there in such a life based upon worldly religion?
2. Of what value was prayer to the Pharisee, according to Matthew 6:5? How does that relate to what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 5:2?
3. How in the world could we ever find any satisfaction in a religion based solely on fear that God would jump down our throats at every move we make?
4. Why would one who has barns overflowing with food, such as the rich man of Luke 12:16-21, not receive satisfaction?
5. How gloomy is life to people who only view such from the standpoint of the things of the earth without anything beyond that? Where could I find any satisfaction for today? Who knows what tomorrow may bring?
6. According to Ecclesiastes 7:12-13, can we believe that God made life crooked? What does Solomon mean?
7. Does Solomon suggest that it is all right to be a little bit wicked in Ecclesiastes 7:17?
8. How can human understanding explain things of life?
9. In view of what he said in Ecclesiastes 8:14, if the same thing happens to the righteous as it does to the wicked, how are we going to get any sense out of life then and make life worthwhile?
10. How many people today who would never deny the existence of God are living by the philosophy of "*Eat, drink and be merry?*" Why are they doing so?
11. What was the difference between the rich man and Lazarus if we just blot out any future life? When they died, what happened? Now what makes the difference? Why is that the case?
12. How could one explain the real values that there are in life if we take away from us the life that the Bible has given to us?

Lesson 12

The Conclusion of His Search

Lesson Text: Ecclesiastes 9-12

The Examples of Life without Divine Wisdom (9:1-11:8)

Now, we begin another section, to which he is doing two things:

- He is recommending and praising worldly wisdom.
- Then, he is giving some examples of the value of worldly wisdom, that is, from the human standpoint.

So it is just better to be alive than it is to be dead (9:1-4), but now watch what he says in the next verse: *“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten”* (9:5). Now, when we read this passage, as I mentioned earlier, he attempts to show that whenever a man dies, that is the end of it, which is a perversion of what the Bible teaches. He makes this statement from the standpoint of human wisdom, and we must keep that in mind. Now, I will show that this is the case, and we will have the contrast that he makes between them.

“Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun” (9:6). Therefore, there is the limitation of that. He is seeing life only from the earthly standpoint, not from the standpoint of divine revelation, which enables us to know how that there is a life beyond this. Looking at it from the human standpoint, he seeks to try to find wisdom from that.

Many very often use Ecclesiastes 9:10 to indicate and support the idea that I have quoted without realizing the real context in which we find it. Well, now, it is true that we are to be enthusiastic in what we are doing, but the philosophy of this verse is to do what we are going to do now, because when we are dead, that is all over—that is the end of it. Now, that is the point in this verse. From the standpoint of earth, if a man is going to get anything out of life, and if this life is all that a man has, he better get busy and fill his life as full as he can, because one of these days, he will be going to the grave, and when he does, it is all over. Now, if that is all there is to life, then a man ought to live that way. He ought to live high every day, because if he does not, when he comes to the end of life, the whole thing is over. That is only true from worldly and human wisdom—that is not true according to divine revelation.

Therefore, he said that there is not any purpose in life—we are just living by chance (9:11). Yet, the man that lives and serves God based upon divine revelation does not live that way.

He said he did not read this wisdom from the Bible (9:12-13). This is wisdom based upon human observation. This is what life looks like to him as he

tries to behold it from just looking out upon it. Then, he gives some advice that he bases upon that.

“What good is wisdom then,” he said (cf. 9:14-15). Here is wisdom of man who did not have anything—they are fixing to overrun the city, but he saved that city from ruin. However, they forgot. Nobody appreciated anything that he did, and they all soon forgot it.

It looked as if wisdom was better than strength, but he was looking at worldly wisdom (9:16).

That is advice given from a worldly standpoint (9:17-18). However, a certain element in it is true, even in relationship to divine revelation. One sinner can destroy much good, but he is thinking about it only from a worldly standpoint.

Now then, he is going to give some examples of how worldly wisdom is to be used. For example, there is his advice: *“If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences”* (10:4). Now, I want to show how that advice will not work if a man is going to live right. Daniel was down in captivity. The law by which Daniel lived said that there were certain things a Jew was not to eat because they were unclean. Therefore, Daniel said he would not eat such: *“Daniel purposed in his heart”* not to eat such (cf. Daniel 1:8). Well, the time came when the decree went out that they were not to pray. Worldly wisdom would say not to be in the den of lions. If this life is all that we live, and there is not anything beyond this life, then we should not throw away our lives and let a lion eat us up. Now, if Daniel had abided by the philosophy that is in Ecclesiastes 10:4, he would have just quit praying. In addition, Nebuchadnezzar called upon Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to fall down and worship the idol, and they said that they would face the fiery furnace. Well now, worldly wisdom would say not to be in there and burned, but rather, to pacify the king. It is only from that standpoint that we are to think of it. Now, it is true that the Bible teaches that we are to be obedient to rulers, but that is not the point here. The point is in relationship to this life alone. In fact, the Bible teaches such in Acts 5 when Peter said, *“We ought to obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29). Peter denied and repudiated the philosophy that Solomon states in that passage. Whenever God’s law conflicts with man’s law, then we do not pacify the king, but worldly wisdom would say, “Yes, that is the way we should do it.”

Well, he gives some good advice (10:5-7). Thus, he said he saw some kings walking and he saw some servants riding. Now, we need to be careful and watch.

He simply gives these statements of advice from a worldly standpoint (10:8). Now, let me show that this is the case: *“Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter”* (10:20). Look at what he says. He said not to talk about the king or he is liable to catch us. That is his philosophy—not because it is a sin and something that is wrong. He said not

to do it because one will catch us. Now, this shows that the motives that are involved in these things are wrong motives—those that relate to one getting along only in this life. Here is a king, and we want something good from the king. Now do not let him catch us talking about him. Here is a rich man, and we may want some help from him. Do not be talking about him. A little bird will carry it to him and we will need something, and we will go to him, say that we are in a tight and need to borrow a little money, and he will say that a little bird told him what we have been saying about him. We will just have to do without money. Now that is the point in this passage, and that is the point of the wisdom and the philosophy that he is giving here. Therefore, a worldly man does some things some times that are right, but there is the wrong motive. He does it from a selfish standpoint. Just think about the number of things that people do just to stay out of trouble, not because they think that it is wrong within itself.

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (11:1). Well, it is true that the Bible teaches to give and it will be given back to us (cf. Luke 6:38), but when he said this, he did so from the standpoint of worldly wisdom. If we do good things to others, they will do good things to us. The philosophy stated in this verse is the same thing that Jesus warned about in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:43-47). The problem here is the motive. It is true that we cast our bread upon the waters, and God blesses us when we do it from the right motive, but it is only when we do it from the right motive.

Then, there is good advice further (11:2-3). Now, we can just look out and see that. Well, we do not have to have the Bible to tell us that a tree, once we cut it down, will not change its direction. We can see that.

“He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap” (11:4). Well, that is just plain, good agricultural wisdom. If a man sat down and watched the wind all the time, he never would do anything.

Therefore, he mentions ignorance (11:5); yet, in trying to encourage people to live by worldly wisdom, he said that he did not know.

He said to go ahead and sow, because we do not know what is going to happen to it (11:6).

Now, here is the conclusion that he makes in this section (11:7-8), all the way back from Ecclesiastes 1:2. This philosophy of life left the men with darkness right back where he was at the beginning of this book. Thus, he has come down to the end of worldly wisdom, and he said that here is the end of it. That is all that there is to it. Now, he is going to make a transition. He is going to lay aside worldly wisdom, beginning in the next verse, and I want to show the difference. In verse 8, he is thinking about life from the standpoint of this world only. Let a man live and live and live; finally, he comes to the end of it, and it is total darkness. He cannot see anything out there. That is despair and vanity.

His Exchange for Divine Wisdom (11:9-12:12)

The same thing that he says to the young man is in verse 8: “*Rejoice.*” In verse 8, he said, “*But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all...*” With that kind of wisdom, it finally ends up in darkness. Yet, now watch it in verse 9. Therefore, he said not to look at life just from this standpoint. Remember that this life is not all there is to life. Rejoice in this life, live life to its fullest and rejoice. The language that he uses there shows that one is to enjoy life and the good things that are in life, but he is to live in this life in view of eternity. He is to live this life in view of another life. He does not see it just as the end of all things. He sees something beyond this life.

Based upon this philosophy of life, he now says what he says in Ecclesiastes 12:1—he says to live life with a different purpose that comes through divine revelation and the light that the Bible gives us. Then he points out that living life from this standpoint will affect us when we get older. We find one of the finest descriptions of age we will find anywhere in the Bible in any kind of history in the verses that follow. We will not ever find anything like it anywhere. How true it is. Occasionally, we will come across somebody that will have all of his teeth that has lived a number of years, but we do not find many of them (cf. 12:2-3). The older we get, the fewer they get, until finally, we go to the dentist and borrow a few. That ought to tell us something. The nights get to be long and they begin to stir early (cf. 12:4). Well, that is just life. We get to where we cannot lift much (11:5)—we find a young man and he wants to show us how much he can pick up. If we find an older man, he wants to show us how quick he can set something down. That is life—a vivid description of it.

Then he writes about coming to the end of life, pictured in these verses. Now that is a different philosophy of life from what we were reading in Ecclesiastes 9:5: “*For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.*” That is the reason I said it is a perversion to read that verse and Ecclesiastes 3 and leave the implication that the Bible teaches that when a man is dead, that is the end of it. That is the philosophy of this world, not the philosophy of divine revelation. Here is the proof of it in this very same book, but in Ecclesiastes 11:9, he made a transition. He laid aside worldly wisdom and said that he was going to look at life from the divine standpoint and as the Bible enables us to see life. As he looked at it from that standpoint, he says to the young man, “Life has meaning in it—rejoice! Live for life that is worthwhile, and in doing that, keep in mind that this world and life are not all there is to life. There is judgment. Now with that in mind, live life to its fullest and its best.” Therefore, that is the correct philosophy.

Conclusion (12:13-14)

Now that is not the fear that we were reading about earlier in the book of Ecclesiastes. This is a different kind of fear. This is the fear that belongs to the

book of Proverbs: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Proverbs 9:10). Now he is writing about this kind of fear here. The fear of God subsequently says not to live for this life, but to keep his commandments in view of judgment.

Now, if we have a KJV, we will know that the word "*duty*" is italicized. The word "*duty*" is not in the text there. What he is saying is that this is the whole of man. Man is intellectual, emotional and volitional. Therefore, here is something that takes in all of man. The philosophy that we have been studying up until now ignored certain parts of man. Oh, it looked at his intellectual wisdom. It tried to stifle his emotions by saying just to be indifferent and do not let anything bother us. It perverted man's will by saying to enter enthusiastically into everything that we do and get all we can out of life right now. Now, that was that philosophy, but here is a different philosophy of life. This has something to do with the wholeness of man.

Then he gives the reason in verse 14. Therefore, he makes the distinction. This wisdom enables one to know what is right and what is wrong. Here is wisdom that helps us to see that there is a life beyond this and God is going to hold us accountable for the way that we use this life. In view of that, then let us use the wisdom of the book of Proverbs so that our life will be lived upon the proper basis.

Now, if I can understand the book of Ecclesiastes, then that is what the book of Ecclesiastes means. I do not believe that there is any other way that we will ever be able to study the book of Ecclesiastes and make any sense out of it. He will have us doing everything and doing some things that are in direct conflict with other things that the Bible says, but when we look at it from this standpoint and see the two kinds of wisdoms that are in this book and a man may have two kinds of wisdoms. He may have the wisdom of this world or he may have the wisdom that comes down from above, he may have the wisdom directed by sight or he may have the wisdom that faith directs. It is up to that man to choose, but just let him remember that if he seeks to work by the wisdom of this world, he will be forever struggling with problems that he can find no solutions to and out of which make no sense. If he lives by faith, he can find a solution to his problems however difficult they may be, for if he can find no other solution than simply to say, "I do not know, I just leave it in the hands of God," then he will not have to be plagued with it. He may say, "I do not know and understand, but I know that God does, and that all things are under his supervision," and with that philosophy of life, then one can understand how to live in spite of the seeming difficulties and the ups and downs of life, and there is no other way for a man to be able to understand life. Therefore, we can see that the book of Ecclesiastes is an important book.

Questions

1. On the basis of what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:1-6, what is his advice?
2. According to Ecclesiastes 9:14-15, what happened to the one who saved the city?
3. When the king decrees against righteousness (cf. Ecclesiastes 10:4), what is one as Daniel going to do? Shall he pacify the king?
4. According to worldly wisdom, would it be wise to put ourselves in a situation where the king arrests us and places us in a den of lions? Can we not see again that this is just one of the many instances in the Bible where we must understand it in the proper light (i.e., Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego)?
5. In which passages does Solomon give the advice, "What will benefit me here and now?"
6. Why does he say what he did in Ecclesiastes 10:20? Does he say not to talk about the king because we ought not to talk about people? Does he say not to talk about rich people because we ought not to talk about people? Is that the motive for not doing that?
7. How often have we heard Ecclesiastes 11:1 given as good advice?
8. Do we believe that if we do good to others that they will do good things to us is the philosophy of this world? Did not Jesus say that we are to do good to our enemies, and that even sinners will do good to those that do good to them (cf. Matthew 5:43-47)?
9. Did we ever cut a tree down, falling toward the south, go out the next morning and it jumped up over toward the north (cf. Ecclesiastes 11:3)?
10. How did Solomon describe older age (12:2-5)? How many teeth do we have left this morning? Are we wearing trifocals this morning? Do we have to reach over to hear? Do we know any older people that sleep until about 8:00 or 10:00 AM every morning? Do we watch going up on high places? Do we always hold onto the handlebars when we climb steps?

Lesson 13

Redemption's Love Song

Lesson Text: Song of Solomon

Introduction

This book has given people all kinds of difficulty in trying to deal with it, but I want to study it in view of the principle that I believe it sets forth—this book is a poem that emphasizes love, and we will try to look at it from that standpoint. In the book of Job, we learn about the difficulty of understanding suffering and the importance of trusting God in the midst of whatever situation we face in life. In the book of Proverbs, we learn how we base wisdom upon the fear of God and how we apply it to everyday life. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we learn about the emptiness of life when men try to walk by sight. We would realize then that the book that followed the book of Ecclesiastes would surely suggest that instead of life being empty and only vanity, life could have meaning and purpose, which is what we have in Song of Solomon.

The theme of this book is love, and, of course, Solomon writes it in the form of poetry and ideal figurative language, but it sets forth the value and the importance of love. As we read Song of Solomon, if we read it with that in mind, we will see that love gives fullness to life, contrasted with the absence of life having any kind of meaning when one walks by sight. Of course, real love is based upon one's knowledge and understanding of God and his love (I John 4:10-11). Therefore, the love that we have set forth in Song of Solomon is that which reflects the love of God. In fact, it may well be that God intended this to set forth his love in the Old Testament. As I was studying this book, it occurred to me that this book is the First Corinthians of the Old Testament, because that is what it means. It would be strange and unusual, as important as love is, if there was not something to give special emphasis to it in the Old Testament. Now, I believe that is what this book does. I believe we need to look at the book and to think about it. It sets out what true love really is, which is the basis of marriage, happiness and a life of fulfillment. Some say that the love reflected here is a reflection of the love of Christ for the church. There is no doubt that the qualities we find here are in Christ and the church. I simply think of it more in reference to the Old Testament. Of course, the ultimate fulfillment would be in the New Testament, but God considered himself as being the bridegroom of Israel, which was his bride. In Hosea, we see the picture of God's love and the nation being guilty of spiritual adultery. Of course, that is why I think of it more in reference to the Old Testament rather than it being a prophetic picture of what we have in the New Testament of Christ and the church. Yet, there is no doubt that everything he says here would be true of Christ and the church.

Thus, what I want to do is to select some verses throughout the book that point out the characteristics of love and how these become the foundation of

marriage. Of course, the same thing can be set forth as a reflection of God's love toward the people of the Old Testament. I believe Song of Solomon calls attention to the remnant of the Old Testament that was special in God's sight. Therefore, he reflects things that he says in this to love.

Now, I have just selected a verse or two out of each chapter, and with these, call attention to some of the characteristics of love.

The Splendor of Service & Sacrifice in Love (1:5-6)

Notice what the bride says. She admits there is not anything special as far as her physical beauty is concerned, and I believe that is important, because as we look through the book and study it, we will see that we do not base the real values of love purely upon physical attraction. There are beauties that are inward and spiritual—beauties of the soul, which really form the basis of what makes one attractive. This becomes the foundation of a real and fundamental marriage.

I believe we greatly need the emphasis of what he says in this book, especially today. The things that he sets forth here are not like Hollywood love and some of the things we see on television, but it is far more than that.

When the bride says, "*Look not upon me, because I am black*" (1:6), the idea is that she is sunburned, been working out in the sun, and she is scorched and tanned as a result of the sun, but there are two principles set forth in this that are characteristic of love—service and sacrifice.

These verses describe the service in which she engaged by doing the work and serving others, but in so doing, she did not take time off to prep up; she had other things in which she was interested. So when she said, "*but mine own vineyard have I not kept,*" that is a suggestion of the sacrifice that she made, that is, personal sacrifice, which she made on behalf of the bridegroom.

Therefore, these two principles are important as far as love is concerned. Real love is always interested in service, and real love is sacrificial. These two basic principles of every real marriage find fulfillment. Where both do not understand the importance of service and sacrifice in relation to the other, there will never be a real marriage as set forth in this book and as God intended.

Therefore, in the very beginning, he gives something worth learning about. So here, he emphasizes the beauties of the soul, the inward characteristics. This is what will appeal to the bridegroom.

The Special Attraction of Love (2:1-2)

We have a song that we call, "The Rose of Sharon," and yet, we apply it to Christ, but I believe it is mistaken as far as this verse is concerned. In the first place, she said, "*I am a rose of Sharon, A lily of the valleys*" (2:1 ASV). She said this to indicate that she was just a plain flower. There was not anything striking about her. She was not a rose in the sense in which we might read and think about it.

In fact, what she says is that which the margin of the ASV says, “plain.” So she says that she is just a plain flower, not anything unusual, but now, watch the reaction of the bridegroom in verse 2 as he replies: “*As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*” Now, as he views her, he sees her as someone that is unusual, special, “*a lily among thorns,*” that is, she has an attraction to him beyond that of anyone else, although she has already said that she is just comely (1:5) and is just a plain flower.

All successful marriages base themselves upon this principle. There must be an attraction for each other that is above that of anybody else. Of course, there is something special, which has to do with inward attitudes and the way a husband ought to look at his wife—she is a lily among thorns, that is, to him, she is a lily. Compared with all others, they are just thorns, and the same way is true in a wife looking at her husband. He is a lily among thorns; that is, there is something special about him.

If we desire the type of love as set forth in this book and the fulfillment in life that God intended that there be in marriage, these characteristics are vital and important. Now, whenever we have marriages based first on service and sacrifice, second on two people who are special to each other, we are not going to have marriages that will fall apart. We are going to have something that is solid upon which to build—without that, then it is very easy for them to fall apart.

The Steadfastness of Love (3:1-4)

In Song of Solomon 3, she is now dreaming at night. Of course, that is characteristic of love, which deals with lovesickness. We see young people in love who sit around daydreaming. Well, here is a picture of that now, but something is special in that.

Here again we have a picture of the steadfastness of love. Notice the language: “...*but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go*” (3:4). Now whenever we base marriage upon that kind of love, we have a marriage that will not tear apart. It does not matter what comes. We can see the sense of seemingly loss when she thought she had lost him. Something was missing in life, and as she dreamed about that, then she started looking, searching and trying to find him. Then, when she found him, she said that she would not let him go.

We need to consider some things in that carefully. These verses show the idea of partnership in marriage. Not only that, but it also shows the danger of one losing a partner. Then, that suggests some things that we ought to be careful about to be sure that we do not allow that to happen. The way to avoid that is to be sensitive and realize the possibility and the danger of things just drifting along, and out of that comes the danger of losing a wife or a husband.

So again, these lessons are worth learning.

The Successful Personality in Love (4:16)

Here, he emphasizes developing the attitudes and the characteristics of life that the other person appreciates—the development of personality. Again, this is important if we are going to have successful marriages.

We all need to think about what kind of characteristics a wife or a husband would appreciate. Then, we should seek to try to develop that kind of characteristics of life that please the other person.

Now, stop and think about that for a little bit. There is the absence of selfishness. There is the interest and concern for another. In fact, all the way through here, he emphasizes unselfishness and concern for the other person.

Therefore, here are personalities that we try to develop that are attractive. Now, we all can work on our personalities to develop the attractive kind. We do not want to be around people who have unattractive personalities. Well, if we are not careful, we can allow certain traits of our character to develop, and our personality will turn out that way. We should work on building within our lives principles influenced by the gospel of Christ that will enable us to be the kind of people that will be attractive.

The Solid Foundation within Love (5:16)

This is an unusual verse, which does not deal with kissing, but deals with words and the things he says.

Again, consider the importance of words. Nothing can be any more cutting—we read that when we studied the book of Proverbs. So, both need to be careful about what they say. It is easy for us to say things that are unkind and cutting; sometimes we say them without stopping to think about them as we should, but the bridegroom was not of that type.

Not only that, look at the word “*my*.” Now to appreciate that, we have got to go back down to Song of Solomon 5:9, where the daughters of Jerusalem, who are a part of the poem, raise the questions, “*What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?*” Therefore, what they are saying is, “What do you see in him?” Nothing is striking about that. She sees something in him that is special and above that of any other men. She sees something in him that others do not see, because the very questions they raised in Song of Solomon 5:9 suggest that.

Again, that ought to be true of both husband and wife. We ought to be able to see in the wife or the husband things that others do not see. In fact, if we go back to the first part of Song of Solomon 5:16, she may see things that words cannot express. Indeed, that is one characteristic of love (cf. II Corinthians 9:15). I suspect that it is a part of what he says here. Now, think about the binding together of souls where there is something so special, it is beyond words to express. That is something that is truly unusual and special.

The Striking Emotions of Love (6:10)

Here, we have a picture of the beauty and the freshness of the morning. Again, he intended this language to suggest that she is a breath of fresh air, and we ought to feel that way toward our wife or husband. Instead of being repulsive, they are like a breath of fresh air. When we base marriage upon that kind of love, we can see how solid it is going to be.

The Satisfaction in Love (7:10)

Here we find the fulfillment, contentment and satisfaction of life. In fact, I believe that verse is suggestive of Genesis 2, where God said concerning Adam, "*It is not good that the man should be alone*" and that he would "*make him an help meet for him*" (cf. 2:18).

Again, we are to build marriages upon such a wonderful solid basis. Whenever there is that feeling that "*I am my beloved's*," there is a special belonging and unusual and exalted appreciation. There is recognition of values that are special to each person. When we build marriages upon these special qualities and characteristics, we will have marriages that are going to be able to stand in spite of the difficulties and the things they may face.

The Spontaneous Nature & Strength of Love (8:4-7)

We find the statement "*...ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please*" three times in the book, and I believe it is significant (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The margin of the ASV says, "*...until it pleases.*"

This suggests several things. First, it denotes the spontaneous nature of love. Love is not something that is forced. That is one of the special characteristics of love. We will recall in Matthew 26:6-13 when Mary poured the ointment out on Christ, one of the characteristics of that was spontaneity. No one came to Mary and said, "Now, here is something you ought to do." She thought of this on her own, which is characteristic of love. There is that spontaneous characteristic of love.

Then again, this reminds us that love is sacred. It is not something with which to trifle. It is precious. Therefore, there is a warning in connection with recognizing what love is.

When we come down to verses 6-7, we have some of the finest language the scriptures have on love that we can find anywhere I know in any poem that anyone has ever written. In Haggai 2:23, we will get the meaning of what the Bible suggests in the word "*seal*," indicating that Zerubbabel was special and precious, which is exactly what this verse says. That is, "Take me into your heart as something that is precious."

Now, we know when we talk about precious things, we consider it valuable. When a husband or wife is as a seal or a signet within the heart of the other as something that is precious, we have a marriage founded upon the rock and is not going to fall apart.

Again, notice further what she says: “...for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave” (8:6). Think about the power of death. First, death is something that is so strong until there comes a time when nothing we can do can resist it. It is unyielding. That is the idea that is there. Take, for example, the matter of a grave. Think of how unyielding a grave is. This is the meaning of the Hebrew word. It does not matter how many tears people shed when one places a body into a grave, it is just unyielding—it will not give up.

Now, here is a picture of love. Think about love that binds together the hearts of husband and wife, and it is as strong as death—it is unyielding and will not let go.

Again, this indicates the strength of it. The word “*cruel*” means that it is unyielding. The verse continues, “...the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame,” which denotes the intensity of it.

Then, in verse 7, we have the loyalty of it: “*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.*” Nothing can put it out. The suffering, pain, trials, heartaches or whatever may come cannot stifle or destroy it. It only makes it stronger.

He continues in the verse, “...if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.” That means nobody can condemn this kind of love placed here. It is something that is so special, everyone would recognize it as being worthwhile, precious, special and unique.

Now, we can see here that love accepts no rival. There is the loyalty that refuses to let go and water cannot quench it.

Conclusion

Now, just look back through the book, read these passages along with many others and think about the qualities of love that we find here. I believe we can see now why I said that this book was the First Corinthians 13 in the Old Testament.

As we read the references to the bride, there is the continual feeling of unworthiness. This denotes lowliness and humility, which is the opposite of pride. Where love is, that will always be true.

Therefore, here then is a picture of lowliness with honor and exaltation. This lowly maiden, pictured as one whom Solomon married, brought to the court, with all the exaltation that would come from that, is a picture of what real love does. It brings about the exaltation of the one that enjoys the love of the other, that is, it considers the honor in the love that the other extends to it.

Therefore, I believe this little book is worthwhile for all of us to study and to look at the principles that we find in it to help us see what love really is. Any marriage based upon the principles that I mentioned is built on a solid foundation (I could have mentioned others—I just selected these from each chapter), and it ought to cause us to examine our hearts and think about our own relationship. If our marriages are not special, then stop and think about the things we studied from Song of Solomon 1 all the way through and try to apply

these to life. In so doing, it will become something special. A fullness of life will come out of that. It will make life a joy.

Of course, then, if we want to move it up into the higher realm, think about each one of these in relationship to God's attitude toward us, and then, in turn, our attitudes toward God. We ought to think about Christ's attitude toward us and our attitudes toward Christ. Every one of these will apply in the spiritual realm just as surely as they do in relationship to marriage, because Ephesians 5:23-33 shows that the marriage relationship is a picture of Christ and the church. It was found in the Old Testament because in Ephesians 5:33, Paul said that he spoke concerning the mystery of Christ and the church.

Therefore, it is in the Old Testament, and there is not any harm done at all in thinking about Christ and the church in relationship to this.

Questions

1. Do you think that your spouse is a "*lily among thorns*?" Is this the way I feel toward my husband or wife?
2. How many marriages have floundered upon the rocks, simply because of a failure to recognize the steadfastness of love in the partnership of marriage?
3. If both husband and wife were careful to try to develop characteristics that please the other, what would that do for a marriage? How many marriages would flounder and fail if we thought about it from that standpoint?
4. Thinking about Song of Solomon 4:16, do we not know people around which we just do not want to be? Do we not know people that are just like the north wind—just to be in their presence is to be in a chill?
5. What do we see in our spouse more than others see in our spouses? Are there values and special characteristics and attributes that we alone see? Now when we have that, what kind of marriage do we have? Can we not see the solid foundation upon which that rests?
6. Does Song of Solomon 6:10 sound like when she comes in with her hair all in rollers?
7. Is my marriage something special?

