

## Thursday Morning Bible Study: Proverbs

### Life In God's World For Dummies

#### 2. The Discipline of the Lord

If we wait for wisdom to arise from out of ourselves, we will wait a very long time! No one is born with wisdom implanted. Wisdom is a gift and a treasure that comes from the outside; it must be given, and it must be received; it must be proffered and it must be sought. Folly is bound up too deeply in our hearts for us to trust what might arise from there! But God in His mercy has given us a community in which, through His disciplines, there are those who have begun to travel the road of wisdom. We can start to find our way on that road too as the Lord disciplines us.

**Prov. 6:20-23** Discipline describes the way by which God gives us, and we learn to seek, wisdom. It involves a number of inter-related words and ideas. The first and most basic level of discipline is *instruction*. This is not formal education, but the passing on of advice and insight by those who have skill in living. It is not focussed so much on giving “knowledge”, but rather to impart “values and norms for conduct.” It is the kind of instruction that a father or mother might give to a child more than a university lecturer will give to a student. Often the wisdom we remember from our parents is in the “sayings” or “mottos” that we remember—like it or not! E.g. “A job worth doing is worth doing well.” “Jack of all trades, master of none.”

Proverbs 6:20-23 is unique in the wisdom literature of the ancient world in according a place to both mother and father in the development of wisdom in children. (See also 1:8.) Throughout the Old Testament, and in many places in the Proverbs particularly, the joint task of father and mother in the raising and shaping of children into mature, responsible people, and the obligation of children to respect both parents, is prominent. “Honour your father and your mother.” See Proverbs 15:20, 19:26, 20:20, 23:22, 23:25, 28:24 and 30:17 especially for exhortation in how this covenantal command is to be lived out in particular ways.

Parents are much more interested in *character* formation than *intellectual* formation. The instruction of the parents in these verses has the intention (v. 22) of guiding, protecting and advising/teaching. The learner, by dedicating himself or herself to this instruction, remembering it, and meditating on it (v. 21) sets himself or herself on the path of *life*, guided by the light and the lamp of the law and wisdom (v. 23.) Our main teachers are our parents. Wise parents are a great gift to anyone. But there are others too in our lives who have been called by God into this means by which He will impart to us His glorious wisdom. Let us not resent the discipline of the Lord.

The basic form of this instruction is through the passing on of proverbs. Proverbs are short, pithy, memorable pieces that both give and withhold their secrets. They are not simply clichés that give everything they have at the first bite. Prov. 1:6 calls them “riddles.” These “riddles” reward their listeners by unfolding over time. Proverbs need to be meditated on: they are like jewels that need to be held up to the light and viewed from various angles; they are like a fine red wine which must be rolled around on the tongue for some time to find all the flavours; they are like cryptic clues in a crossword that seem impenetrable until the key to them is chanced upon from an unusual angle.

Those who listen to instruction are then further disciplined by *encouragement*, as well as by experience in life that will draw them to pursue even further wisdom that they need to understand things more deeply, to have a “second opinion” on the cases they are faced with. Ongoing advice and teaching are part of this process.

In 6:22, the instruction and discipline has the intention of guiding, protecting and advising/teaching. Daniel Estes expands this list<sup>1</sup> and says:

“The teacher endeavours to create in the learner a personal commitment to diligence, discipline and devotion to wisdom. In other words, a primary goal for education is that the learner may accept for himself the values that wisdom propounds so that his life is shaped by Yahweh’s desires. [Proverbs 7:1-5.]

“Closely related to the goal of commitment is the emphasis on the development of godly character. This quality of character provides the learner with an internal compulsion to keep learning and growing in wisdom. [Prov. 2:7, 4:23, 9:9.]

“The emphasis in Proverbs 1-9 on the development of the learner’s competence, or skill in living, is communicated through seven key Hebrew terms ...prudence [clear-sightedness for true judgment] ...discretion [the ability to form well-considered plans]...guidance [finding a way through complex circumstances]...sound judgment [effectiveness in getting results]...wise dealing [a good sense for what is right, just and fair]...understanding [being able to weigh alternatives] and wisdom [the ability to teach others]. The aggregate sense of these terms is that education endeavours to develop in the learner the competence necessary to function independently as a godly person in Yahweh’s world.

“Proverbs 1-9 also seeks to protect the learner from the dangerous influences that can harm his life. By portraying realistic pictures of enticements to sin, the teacher forewarns the learner against the threats from personal vices, peers, evil men and evil women. Thus, wisdom has both developmental and preventative goals. [Prov. 1:22 outlines the particular vices—gullibility, arrogance, autonomy. Prov. 6 shows the dangers of impulsiveness and gullibility (1-5); laziness (6-11); violence and malice (12-19); and, then lastly, as a separate comment, sexual faithlessness (20-35).]

“As an incentive for the learner to accept the way of wisdom, the teacher describes the prosperity that wisdom affords. In the area of personal life, Yahweh’s way of wisdom leads to well-being, success, stability, wealth, health, honour and satisfaction. Wisdom also enriches social relationships by providing intrinsic cohesion to counteract the impulses of human independence and competitiveness. Further more, wisdom enables the learner to enjoy the blessings that Yahweh bestows on those whom he favours. [Prov. 2:21-22; 3:7-8; 4:8-9, 10, 18-19; 9:11]

“The ultimate goal for education in Proverbs 1-9 is the knowledge of God. Just as the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (9:10), so it is the end of wisdom as well (2:5). The knowledge of God is the supreme goal that draws all of education and life together into an integrated whole.”<sup>2</sup>

Those however who will not receive instruction will find that they need *rebuke* and *correction*. Even the wise person, or the person on the way of wisdom, may find that reproof is needed—Prov. 3:11-12. The LORD is so determined to make us wise, to make us mature and godly in his world, to be blessed and a blessing, that he will do

---

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Estes, *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9*, APOLLOS:1997, pp.63-86

<sup>2</sup> All underlining and bracketed comments are mine.

whatever is needed. He is not an indulgent father, but a strong, loving, committed father who wants not just our good but also the best for us. The most foolish thing to do with this reproof is to hate, resist, and refuse it—5:12-14—that leads a person away into dishonour. The reproof of the LORD always has a sting to it, and it is generally delivered through a human agent—and this leads to the danger of the one reproved finding reason to ignore or dismiss the reproof.

And sometimes when reproof, correction and admonition is ignored, *punishment* is needed. There are times when it seems that “fate” or “nature” itself seems set against the scoffer who has refused Lady Wisdom’s call—and when it does she laughs, she has no sentimental pity. Calamity (here it seems to be an event outside the control and action of the person) may be needed, and Lady Wisdom has strength to see it through. Prov. 1:20-33 is a strong warning, especially vv. 26ff. At times the foolishness of refusing discipline brings about its own punishment. So, the foolish who seek to gain at the expense of others find it rebounds on their own heads—Prov. 1:17-19, 31. At other times correction, rebuke and punishment comes through others, or by God’s own hand.

The scoffer and the fool must in many ways be left to their own devices, and suffer the consequences of their folly. There is little room in the Proverbs for “harm minimisation” for them. If there is any harm minimisation, it is for the naïve, the simple. But it is harm minimisation that takes place in the context of strong exhortation to find the better way of wisdom and to avoid all the ways of folly and wickedness.

The constant call of the father in the Proverbs is “My son, be attentive to my words, to my wisdom...” This is the call of God to us in Jesus Christ. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14.)

Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are brought to the Father as adopted, beloved sons and daughters. And we are being conformed to Christ, shaped up to bear his likeness more and more. This is through difficulty as well as through joy. “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons [and daughters.] For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons... [H]e disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:7-11)”