

Proverbs | The Spirit of Wisdom for Daily Life

Invitation to Wisdom (I)

1.1-7; Colossians 2.1-4; 1st Corinthians 1.20-24

7.1.18

Proverbs 1.1-7 *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: ² To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, ³ To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity; ⁴ To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion, ⁵ A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, ⁶ To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles. ⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Colossians 2.1-4 *For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.*

1 Corinthians 1.20-25 *Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Today, as promised, we begin a series on the Book of Proverbs... Normally, we use the summer to look at the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and that usually means the New Testament Letters...

This summer we ARE looking at the Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church (as we normally do) but in The Psalms (the series just completed) and now The Proverbs.

As we'll hope to see...in coming weeks...one of the main works of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is the CULTIVATION OF WISDOM... We could call it, "the sanctification of our minds" i.e. our way of thinking about God, about others, about the world, our callings, our selves: OUR MINDS start to see things from a new perspective...our thinking gets gradually renewed...gets HOLY...and THIS ultimately is the work of the Third Person of the Trinity.

Today we simply want to introduce this book and the topic of wisdom; then look at the key to getting true wisdom and finally to start thinking of living by this NEW LOGIC...affecting how we see everything.

The book begins with this little inscription, "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel". Solomon was David's son (by Bathsheba) and the successor to David's throne... He is called the wisest man on earth in his day (1 Kings 4.29ff) ...and he apparently wrote many of the sayings in this book and helped compile many others...

You may know that Solomon's life didn't end so well (1 Kings 11) and we'll wonder what went wrong...and maybe we'll delve into that a bit as we move along.

Other writers are named as well ... and these sayings are NOT all from within Israel (some are found in Egyptian writings) but here they're presented within a new interpretive grid.

The word "Proverb" can refer to sayings and short teachings... often they are a kind of parable written in one sentence, e.g. 14.1: "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands."

And the purpose of the book is stated right from the start: "To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding..." (1.2)

This book is dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom...and knowledge...and instruction...and discernment... AND YOU'LL NOTICE all kinds of words, synonyms for this quest are PACKED into this introductory paragraph.

The idea is that "Common sense ain't so common!"

It has to be pursued. To have common sense or good sense or what the writer calls wisdom, instruction, knowledge, understanding, discretion, prudence – it doesn't just HAPPEN... it's a pursuit.

The first NINE chapters is a kind of preamble. It's a section meant to convince children that wisdom is very, VERY, VERY desirable and valuable. It's only after NINE CHAPTERS reasoning and persuading and pleading and convincing his son about how very valuable wisdom IS that the formal proverbs actually begin in chapter 10. The point is: "before I give you this treasure of wisdom – you have to want it!"

Well... we'll get more facts and introductory stuff in the coming weeks but one last truth here: wisdom is seen in this book (in fact in the whole Bible) as much more than just data...more than just information and factoids. It's not simply for intellectuals or philosophers and it's NOT really about "I.Q."

On one hand, wisdom is about skill for living. It's like learning to swim: you can read about it but even after you've read 100 books about swimming – if you never get into the water you really don't KNOW how to swim... So wisdom is never MERELY theoretical and it has to be played out experientially.

Second, wisdom is moral and spiritual. Even in this brief introductory paragraph you find synonyms that are inescapably moral. Wisdom is synonymous with righteousness, with behavior, with discernment and prudence. The Fool (and that's one of a number of different characters we'll meet in this book) the Fool is NOT a person with a low I.Q. – it's a person who may have a lot of facts, a lot of education and what we would call intelligence but is essentially self-seeking ... lazy...immoral ... talks too much...talks too little... is mean...is turned in on himself.

And conversely, there may be a person with little intellectual capacity but who is generous, loving honest, diligent – and that person may be truly wise.

And so, what is the Key that makes a person "Truly Wise"? And that question brings us to the central idea of this book... It's found in v. 7 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge..."

The writer is saying what is stated in the NT as "what would it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his very self" (Mk 8.36) In Proverbs' terms "what good is it to have immense intelligence...a head full of facts and information and yet to never realize the purpose for all that knowledge?"

What good would it be to be a walking, talking super-computer who uses his knowledge to hurt people and spoil the world...and then you die?

This collection of wisdom starts with this basic axiom: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge..." Again in CH 9 v. 10: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy One is understanding." It's the theme of the book.

To know all about the universe and never meet or know the Maker of the universe is tragic...foolish in the extreme.

Now, what is meant by this phrase so often repeated in the Book of Proverbs, "the fear of the LORD"?

Let's make a few important observations: #1 - Bruce Waltke (maybe today's leading scholar on Proverbs) has said that the phrase cannot be understood just by looking up the words in a dictionary.

His example was “Butterfly”: look up butter and look up fly... and you still have no idea of what a butterfly is. Or “Pineapple” – look up pine and look up apple...

It’s a phrase and an idea can only be understood as a whole. It’s specifically “fear of YHWH”...not any god.

He goes on to say that fear is repulsive – you run away from what you fear. But love is attractive – you run to it. And while it’s really impossible to fear God without loving Him AND impossible to love God without fearing Him – what bridges the two is TRUST.

To fear God is to take Him seriously. That He factors supremely in ones decisions... He is the Judge of all persons and all spirits. You and I and every human being will stand before Him to give answer for our thoughts, words and deeds...and He knows all about you.

And yet... again...it’s not simply a dictionary definition of fear... it’s more than awe or reverence or respect... It’s the whole truth that the (capital) “L-O-R-D” (“YHWH”) the only true and living God entered into covenant with the people of Abraham... He showed His holiness (uniqueness!) at Sinai to Moses and the people...and they feared.

And yet...while we deserve His judgment ...He Himself, by countless symbols and signs...by analogy and emblem...by types and shadows showed His people in all their history that HE HIMSELF WOULD CARRY THEIR GUILT and He would cover their debt.

And at a moment in history, He took our place. He demonstrated NOT only His aversion and complete incompatibility with our cruelty and selfishness and our rebellion against the true, good and beautiful... not only did He show His holy disgust against sin – but He took the blame... He incarnated and became ONE WITH US – so He could take our judgment.

In Jesus Christ – God took the judgment I deserved. This enables me to fear Him and simultaneously love Him. It’s the reason I can trust Him. I have known a fearsome love... no wonder the 147th Psalm puts the two ideas together: “The LORD delights in those who fear him, those who put their hope in his unfailing love (hesed).”

Unless you know the love of God, you really can’t have “the fear of the LORD”... You can have a cowering dread and a slavish groveling but that’s NOT the fear of the LORD that leads to wisdom...

Only by seeing what you really deserve and then seeing what God did in Jesus Christ to carry your guilt and take your judgment and PAY your debt... to answer FOR you before the throne of judgment only THEN can you have that clean (Ps. 19.9) fear of the LORD that leads to wisdom.

And that's why, when we come to the NT, we find that Jesus Christ IS the wisdom of God...In Him justice and mercy meet (Ps 85.10). Fear and Love are united by trust. "I can trust this holy Judge because, in Jesus Christ, He took away the guilt of my sins, past present and future...I know what it is to be loved!"

"The LORD delights in those who fear him, those who put their hope in His unfailing love (hesed)."

When we read the Apostles' prayers for wisdom in the lives of these young Christians and new converts... the Apostles are saying "In Jesus, the fearsome love of the Holy God is manifest...and YOU are learning what it means to be freed from guilt by GRACE!... Now, relate to God on THAT basis – that He loves you and YOU CAN TRUST His unfailing love."

Now learn to relate to others that way – that you can forgive because YOU HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN...

Relate to yourself that way – see yourself as belonging to Abba – God is your Father who because of Jesus Christ has NOTHING against you – no outstanding debts... You are His workmanship and He is including you in His plan to love and bless the world... your job is a calling...a partnership with Him!

True wisdom...to know how to live in this world and to prepare for the next is about knowing and experiencing God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2.2-3)... to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1Cor 1.24).

Stay with us in these coming weeks as we unpack it together... living by this NEW LOGIC...the wisdom of God in the Proverbs but realized in the mystery that Jesus Christ is, the embodiment of wisdom.

Jesus Christ said of Himself "behold, something greater than Solomon is here." (Mat 12.42)

I'm looking forward to this series and how God will use it in our lives... to sanctify our minds and bring the wisdom, the New Logic of the Good News to all the very practical areas of life.