

From the Foolishness of Folly to the Wealth of Wisdom

#1 in Series – *Proverbs: Wisdom for the Ages and Now*

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During last week’s message, we briefly considered a truth that deserves a great deal of attention... In looking to Matthew 28:18-20, we saw that the command to “¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” is a very interesting construct... It is an *aorist participle* – which is literally translated – “*Having gone*”... We stated that Jesus assumes you are going into the world... You are going about the experience of living life – but here He is stating that – as you *go* – carry out His commission – and we spend the rest of our time looking at that commission and how – in serving Jesus – this commission will be among the highest priorities of our lives...

There is a brother whom I’ve recently begun following on Twitter, and he has been used of the Lord to make me think... He is –

Ray Ortlund Jr. (The recently retired Pastor of Immanuel Church in Nashville, He also serves as President of Renewal Ministries, Regional Director in the Acts 29 Network, and Council Member of The Gospel Coalition.) – “Everyone is on a path. Everyone is going somewhere. When we feel stuck, even when we feel trapped, the truth is, we are still in motion. Life is a journey, and the end of it all is not just a place but also a condition. We are becoming the end of our journey, wise or foolish, and every moment takes us closer there.”

He is reminding us that everyone is headed somewhere... But the question must be answered – where are we going?... What are we becoming? What is the best path forward for your life? How should we seek to navigate our way through this life with all of its pitfalls and problems?

All of those questions – and many others – should matter deeply to us... They matter to God.

We are living in a time when there is an endless amount of information and opinions available at your fingertips... Every day, you are being bombarded with advice and appeals concerning everything from how to spend your money, to how to spend your time – and with whom – and on what...

There is an endless supply of social media feeds, blogs, radio and TV that call out to us and invite us to listen... It seems that almost everyone is trying to tell us what is right, good, and true....

The big question is – to whom we listen?... Whose voice are you prone to listen to?

➤ **Reading the Book of Proverbs**

First, we need to think about how we should go about reading the book of Proverbs...

We should approach this book with the understanding that God is actually showing us what life looks like when we submit our lives to Him. Every word – every verse – is calling out to us to realign our thinking – to surrender our hearts – and to fully reorient our entire lives according to God's will and leadership...

Proverbs provides us a picture of wisdom and reality – as God reveals it.

As we saturate our minds and hearts with the book of Proverbs – it will be like Jesus is walking with us through this book – showing us just how we were designed to live our lives. He will be guiding us every step of the way and calling us come to follow Him and receive His wisdom for life!

We need to remember – Jesus didn't merely leave heaven and come to this earth – to simply give us a model of what a wise and godly life looks like!... He came to redeem and rescue those who are deep into darkness... Jesus gave His life on a cross so that we could experience new life in Him!... And what that new life can and should look like is laid out in the book of Proverbs.

Jesus says that those whom He redeems are salt and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16).

Matthew 5:13-16 (NASB)

¹³“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how ^[a]can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a ^[b]hill cannot be hidden;¹⁵ nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a ^[c]basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

He also says that we are like a city set on top of a hill, whose light is seen by everyone... The book of Proverbs functions as a blueprint for how that city should look. The more we individually, and as a church align ourselves with God's design for everyday life – the more the light of God's glory will shine from us to those in darkness around us!... Proverbs describes what it looks like to live as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Proverbs provide vital information for our being a part of God's mission in this world... God's mission moves through gospel proclamation and kingdom demonstration... We have something to say – the gospel! And we have lives to live – that reflect that gospel!... Proverbs gives us a beautiful picture of what life inside of God's kingdom looks like... As we both proclaim the gospel and demonstrate lives that are submitted to our King – lives that are clearly laid out for us in the book of Proverbs – those whom the Lord will rescue out of the darkness around us will be drawn to the light of Christ in us!

We are to read – and live in the book of Proverbs – with the attitude of loving submission to our Lord in everything He shows us in how a citizen of His Kingdom is to live while we remain in this sin-saturated world that is all around us... As we faithfully do so – we can expect such change within us that our lives will truly reflect and glorify the Lord Who has redeemed us!

As we share this series together. Prayerfully read the chapter that corresponds to the day's date... Today is the 1st of the month – so before you sleep tonight – prayerfully digest chapter 1... If you do this – you will have slowly read through the book twice before we move on from this series...

➤ **The Structure of the Book of Proverbs**

The book of Proverbs can be divided into five major sections:

- **Introduction** (1:1-7)

The introduction provides us with the primary purpose for the entire book – which is to provide wisdom to the simple... Most importantly, the introduction tells us that the foundation and essence of all true wisdom is rooted in “the fear of the Lord”.

- **Wisdom Discourses** (1:8-9:18)

This section reads much like a long speech or lecture on wisdom and folly... The various speeches or lectures found in this section don't typically fit into what most people associate with the Proverbs (short, easy-to-remember sayings)... Yet it provides us with God's wisdom and insight into the day-to-day aspects of life.

- **The Proverbs of Solomon** (10:1-22:16; 25:1-29:27)

These proverbs were given to us through Solomon. They are mostly short, thought-provoking, pithy statements on wisdom and folly... They contain observations about everything from humanity to nature to wise and foolish people... Read this section slowly and give a lot of time thinking and praying about what you've read.

- **Wise Sayings of Others** (22:17-24:34)

There is not a lot known about the authors of this section... The style is very similar to Solomon's Proverbs that come before and after... This section tends to be longer discourses – rather than short, pithy statements.

As Proverbs comes to a close – it ends with three brief sections that are independent from one another...

- **Sayings of Agur (30)**
- **Sayings of Lemuel (31:1-9)**
- **A Poem to a Godly Woman (31:10-31)**

These three sections are perhaps the most unique, in style and content, to the book of Proverbs.

Now to the text for our consideration today:

Pro. 1:2-7

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

²⁰Wisdom shouts in the street,
She lifts her voice in the square;

Because I want to end this message focusing on the positive, we will begin our examination with the negative:

1. The Faltering Faultline of Folly

There are 93 times that either the word “*fool*”, “*foolish*” and “*folly*” appears in the book of Proverbs...

A simple definition of Folly is – “lack of good sense; foolishness”... And the reality is – we all suffer from “lacking good sense” and if left to ourselves, we can become evermore “foolish” with our actions and values...

Given that we were born in a fallen world, with a nature that is marred by sin – we have a default mode to our thoughts and desires that most often prove to be opposite of what God desires for us...

Our hearts are captivated by most anything other than for the One for Whom we were made... Our thinking especially proves to be the opposite of what God prescribes and describes in His Word as the way of the righteous... In other words – we are messed up... Our “natural” way of living proves to be faulty at best...

There is a field of study that would be beneficial to us to give some time to... It is called “The Noetic Effects of Sin” – or the “Noetic Effects of the Fall”. It addresses the effects that sin and the fall have upon the mind...

R.C. Sproul – “The fall into sin has caused mankind to ignore and deny their Creator. Sin has affected our minds and causes our thinking to become futile apart from Christ. This effect of sin upon our minds is known in theology as the ‘noetic effects of sin’.” (<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/noetic-effects-sin/>)

Noetic – comes from the Greek word for “mind”... So, noetic deals with the mind, or the rational aspect of the person... And to think about the noetic effects of sin – we are specifically thinking about how the fall into sin has affected our ability to think and reason...

R. Albert Mohler – President of The SBTS (The Briefing, May 4, 2017, spoke to the –
“Noetic effects of the Fall and the naturalistic worldview’s failure to explain the limits of reason”

He identifies 14 different kinds of intellectual faults that are directly attributable to the Fall. These are called the noetic or the process of knowing effects of the Fall.

- The first is **ignorance**. The very fact that ignorance exists is evidence of the Fall. Adam and Eve were not affected by ignorance. We can be affected by an absolutely fatal ignorance.
- **Distractedness** is a second noetic effect of the Fall. We cannot maintain our concentration... We are distracted very easily.
- The third intellectual fault is **forgetfulness**. One of our main frustrations is we no longer know everything we knew... And that's not only forgetting eighth-grade algebra, that is also forgetting something that we read just an hour ago. We do not remember as we wish we would.
- **Prejudice** is a fourth problem, every single human mind affected by sin is affected by prejudice...
- The fifth intellectual fault is **faulty perspective**. We do not see as we should. Just take a painting, if you turn it sideways or upside down, at least in terms of representational art, it changes the picture entirely. "Sometimes given our own faulty intellectual operations we fail to have the right perspective and thus we misjudge reality."
- **Intellectual fatigue** is a sixth problem, this is one that affects us all. We grow tired. Our minds, our reason, will grow tired...
- **Inconsistencies** are a seventh problem. Inconsistencies mean that something is wrong. The law of non-contradiction means that two contradictory truth claims cannot both be equally true, but every one of us, no matter how consistent we seek to be, in our own inability to be totally consistent is affected by inconsistencies...

- **Failure to draw the right conclusion** is an eighth problem. We can be presented with absolutely correct data and still draw the wrong conclusion. That is very frustrating and we see that in others, we need to be able to see it in ourselves as well.
- **Intellectual apathy** is a ninth problem. We sometimes simply don't care enough to intellectually engage. That too is an effect of sin.
- Dr. Mohler goes on to identify **close-mindedness, intellectual pride, miscommunication** and **partial knowledge** as other devastating effects of sin...

These are but a few of the effects on our minds that sin that we were born with and will have to endure until we are delivered out of this sin-cursed world...

We don't have time today to talk about all the effects that the fall and our sin have upon our hearts – our desires and motivations... Yet, those things are also addressed throughout Proverbs as well as the rest of the Bible...

Simply stated - as a result of the fall – we have a default mode toward folly – don't we?...

Now do you see why I wanted to deal with the negative portion of this message first?...

2. The Wonderful Wealth of Wisdom

Wisdom – “the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting.”

Charles Hadden Spurgeon – “Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.”

Knowledge is what is gathered over time through study of the Scriptures... It can be said that wisdom acts properly upon that knowledge... Wisdom is the appropriate application of knowledge...

Knowledge understands the light has turned red; wisdom applies the brakes.

Knowledge sees the pitfall; wisdom walks around it.

Knowledge memorizes the Ten Commandments; wisdom obeys them.

Knowledge learns of God; wisdom loves Him.

James 1:5-8 (NASB)

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.