

It is another great Monday morning, and time to look into the Word of God. Well ... today's Devotional is more of a "class-room in Scripture" but then, we need that too! Let's learn just a little about the wonderful Book of Proverbs ... in seven lessons! Please, stay with me through this series!

WISDOM AND INSTRUCTION: THE RESERVOIR OF TRUE KNOWLEDGE!

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

Posted on August 16, 2021

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7; NASB)

“The LORD founded the earth by wisdom and established the heavens by understanding.” (Proverbs 3:19; HCSB)

This is the first in a series of seven Devotionals developed out of the Book of Proverbs. These Devotionals are not to be considered an exhaustive treatment of any of the Proverbs, and much less of the entire Book of Proverbs. It is my desire to acquaint people with the purpose of the Book of Proverbs, the plan of the Book of Proverbs, and the patterns in which some of the Proverbs appear. I must confess at the beginning that these Devotionals will probably be more Teaching/Devotionals than “Touch-the-heart/Devotionals.” I make no apology for that, because the Bible is God’s “Textbook for Life,” as well as His “Love Letter” to His children. He has given it to us, His children, and we need to dig deeply into this great Book of God, and learn what God wants us to know and to apply to our lives.

First, let’s get a little background material into our minds and hearts. The Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament as we know it today is composed of three basic parts:

A. The Law – comprising the first five books of the Old Testament, known as the Torah or the Law. Sometimes it is referred to as the Pentateuch, and includes the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

B. The Prophets – including the Former Prophets of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, and the Latter Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets, namely, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. These are usually known as the Nevi’im, or the Prophets.

C. The Writings – divided into three parts: the Poetical Books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Job, the Five Scrolls or the Megilloth, consisting of the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, and Ecclesiastes, and the Historical Books of Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 and 2 Chronicles. These books are known as the Kethuvim, or Writings.

Together these three sections of the Jewish Bible, or Old Testament, are often referred to as the TANAKH, three sets of two letters each: TA to represent the Torah, the Law known to us as the Pentateuch, then NA to represent the Nevi’im, or Prophets, and finally, KH to represent the Kethuvim, or Writings. And so, we have the Old Testament in its Hebrew arrangement.

In the Old Testament there were three groups of people who communicated basic truth to the people on behalf of God.

1. The Priests set forth the Law of God.
2. The Prophets proclaimed the Word of the God and visions.
3. The Elders gave spiritual and practical counsel to the people.

These three groups with their responsibilities form the heart of the Book of Proverbs, and are summarized in an interesting fashion by the Prophet Ezekiel: “Then they will seek a vision from a prophet, but the law will perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders.” (Ezekiel 7:26)

The Book of Proverbs went through some serious struggles before it made it into the canon of the Old Testament. The beginning of the Old Testament as we know it today is shrouded in mystery. This study will not attempt in any way to delve into the development of the Old Testament canon. Just know that the Book of Proverbs, though it met with serious opposition through the early establishment of the list of documents considered to be Holy Scripture, it is included as a solid part of the Divinely inspired part of the Bible we know as the Old Testament. It is a part of both the Hebrew and English arrangements of the Old Testament, and is fully accepted by both the Hebrew (or Jewish) community and as a valid part of the evangelical doctrine of Scripture by Christians.

The key verse to the Book of Proverbs is stated above, and I repeat it here: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7; NKJV) In other words, one’s reverence and respect for God, means to stand in awe of His holiness, righteousness, majesty and power, for this brings a very real sense of trust in and reliance on Him. It is at that point that one finds the foundation to true knowledge, wisdom, and instruction. From this idea come such powerful and meaningful concepts as understanding, discretion, discernment, discipline, guidance, competence, correction and counsel as these are involved in living a holy life in all relationships, including our relationship with God, with others and with our personal self. It is no wonder that Solomon in all his glory and wisdom penned such magnificent instruction for us: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5, 6; NKJV)

Why do we have the Book of Proverbs? The Book of Proverbs in Chapter 1, answers this question with a five-part response in the following verses: (I am using the Holman Christian Standard Bible for these.)

1. “For gaining wisdom and being instructed;” (v 2a)
2. “For understanding insightful sayings;” (v 2b)
3. “For receiving wise instruction in righteousness, justice, and integrity;” (v 3)
4. “For teaching shrewdness to the inexperienced, knowledge and discretion to a young man – a wise man will listen and increase his learning, and a discerning man will obtain guidance;” (vv 4, 5)
5. “For understanding a proverb or a parable, the words of the wise, and their riddles;” (v 6)

All true wisdom comes from God, but people have a responsibility to search and seek after wisdom, as noted in Proverbs 2:1-12. It is true that, “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” but people need to study, to learn, and to apply wisdom to their lives in order to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and live an abundant life. Searching for and applying true wisdom to one’s life will keep that person from making some terrible errors in judgment.

Where do we begin? I submit to you that we begin where the Bible begins: “In the beginning, God...” What can we learn about God from just a glance at the Book of Proverbs? It would take more than a life-time of study, teaching, preaching, and writing enough books to fill a large library, to even come close to discovering all that the Book of Proverbs teaches about God – and then, from Barney E. Warren’s hymn, “Joy Unspeakable,” - “The half has never yet been told.” The Book of Proverbs presents powerful instructional teaching about the person and work of God. This may be summarized in the following statements as a synthesis of the many Proverbs that focus on the nature of God.

1. God has the power behind and in the creation of the universe including all living creatures.
2. God is always aware of what is going on in His universe including the life of every person.
3. God exercises His sovereign authority or rulership over all creation including all humankind.
4. God has an implacable hatred and intolerance for all that is sin and violation of His Word.
5. God has an inflexible compassion for, and is the Redeemer of all who put their trust in Him.

Let’s allow one of the great Proverbs teach us the truth regarding this eternal truth. Here is where we really begin any study in the Word of God. “The LORD founded the earth by wisdom and established the heavens by understanding.” (Proverbs 3:19; HCSB)

What observations about God and our relationship to Him can we glean from this Proverb? At least the following are evident.

1. The earth and the heavens were brought into existence by God Himself.
2. Wisdom is obviously a part of the nature of God.
3. Wisdom and understanding are complementary ... the second supports the first.
4. The words founded and established are likewise complementary, the first supported by the second.
5. The words founded and established when together teach the stability and permanence of the creation of God.

What conclusions can we draw from these observations that focus on our relationship to God? Here is the practical part of any Biblical study - the combination of some of the conclusions that can stand in evidence attesting to the reality of the truth that has been presented and observations noted, and the applications that have risen from the observations and that have become obvious in this Proverb, or any part of the Holy Scriptures. These, however, emerge from our observations gleaned from a look at Proverbs 3:19.

1. An affirmation that there IS an Almighty God Who is sovereign over that which He has created.

2. An affirmation that there IS a universe composed of the earth and the heavens, and that we as individuals are a part of that creation.
3. As a human being, possessing the basic attributes of existence including the abilities to reason, to respond, and to relate, and at the same time possessing evident limitations to those abilities, I too am subject to the sovereign power of God that cares for and controls the universe He has created.
4. This Proverb should create in me a constant sense of awe when I think of the greatness, the power, the sovereignty, and the majesty of God.
5. This Proverb should evoke from me a consistent recognition of my limited humanity and God's unlimited Deity with all that is involved in that term, thereby respecting the awesomeness of God's creation.
6. This Proverb should effect from me a commitment to be a good steward of and accept my personal responsibility to every part of God's creation to which I can relate.
7. This Proverb should elicit from me a reverent respect for and submission to God that not only flies in the face of the efforts of humanism to destroy belief in the existence of God, but that boldly declares my personal faith in and total commitment to God as the Center and Authority in my life.

Next week, we want to look a little further into the Book of Proverbs in our quest to learn what this great Book tells us about God.

We may not know a lot in this age of advanced knowledge in the many fields of academia, but the truth presented by Ira F. Stanphill in his 1950 song rings true for all the followers of Jesus, our LORD.

I KNOW WHO HOLDS TOMORROW

1. I don't know about tomorrow; I just live from day to day.
 I don't borrow from its sunshine, for its skies may turn to gray.
 I don't worry o'er the future, for I know what Jesus said:
 And today I'll walk beside Him, for He knows what is ahead.

CHORUS after each verse:

Many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand;
 But I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand.

2. Ev'ry step is getting brighter as the golden stairs I climb;
 Ev'ry burden's getting lighter; ev'ry cloud is silver-lined.
 There the sun is always shining; there no tear will dim the eye
 At the ending of the rainbow; where the mountains touch the sky.

3. I don't know about tomorrow – it may bring me poverty;
 But the One who feeds the sparrow is the One who stands by me.
 And the path that is my portion may be through the flame or flood;
 But His presence goes before me, and I'm covered with His blood.