

September 27, 2021. Hard to believe, isn't it? Summer is fading, and the artistry of fall is beginning to capture our attention. Yesterday, September 26, I was not only surprised, but blessed beyond what my words can express. The class I am teaching on the Book of Revelation, gathered together in a beautiful restaurant, and treated me to dinner AND a very, very generous gift. These are some of the dearest friends I have in this life. They, with me, are listening for the Trumpet of God and the voice of the Archangel ... announcing His return for His own. Until then, let's keep working in the Word, witnessing in the world, and waiting patiently for His return. I trust today's rather lengthy Devotional will become a rich blessing for you. It is just one more from the great Book of Proverbs.

THE GREAT CONTRAST!

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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"The one who follows instruction is on the path to life, but the one who rejects correction goes astray."

Proverbs 10:17; HCSB)

First, let me apologize for the length of this Devotional. But I trust it will be a blessing to you. There are a number of contrasting words used in the Scriptures. We learn about good and evil, wisdom and foolishness, poor and rich, proud and humble. The most common terms used to describe people in the Book of Proverbs are the terms the righteous and the wicked. Throughout the Book of Proverbs these terms are used in a variety of contexts. Sometimes they are used quite separately from each other, while at other times they are shown as immediate contrasts. In some statements the actual terms are used while in others the meaning is clear from the context of the verse or the strophe within the verse. At this point we are going to look at a series of contrasting statements about the righteous and the wicked.

1. "The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the just." (Proverbs 3:33)
2. "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death." (Proverbs 10:2)
3. "The LORD will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but He casts away the desire of the wicked." (Proverbs 10:3)
4. "Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked." (Proverbs 10:6)
5. "The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot." (Proverbs 10:7)
6. "The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked." (Proverbs 10:11)
7. "The labor of the righteous leads to life, the wages of the wicked to sin." (Proverbs 10:16)
8. "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is worth little." (Proverbs 10:20)
9. "The fear of the wicked will come upon him, and the desire of the righteous will be granted." (Proverbs 10:24)
10. "When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked is no more, but the righteous has an everlasting foundation." (Proverbs 10:25)
11. "The hope of the righteous will be gladness, but the expectation of the wicked will perish." (Proverbs 10:28)
12. "The way of the LORD is strength for the upright, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity." (Proverbs 10:29)
13. "The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not inhabit the earth." (Proverbs 10:30)
14. "The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut out." (Proverbs 10:31)
15. "The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse." (Proverbs 10:32)
16. "The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them." (Proverbs 11:3)
17. "The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way aright, but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness." (Proverbs 11:5)
18. "The righteousness of the upright will deliver him, but the unfaithful will be caught by their lust." (Proverbs 11:6)
19. "The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead." (Proverbs 11:8)

20. "When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation." (Proverbs 11:10)
21. "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked." (Proverbs 11:11)
22. "The wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward." (Proverbs 11:18)
23. "Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished; but the posterity of the righteous will be delivered." (Proverbs 11:21)
24. "The desire of the righteous is only good, but the expectation of the wicked is wrath." (Proverbs 11:23)
25. "He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage." (Proverbs 11:28)
26. "A man is not established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous cannot be moved." (Proverbs 12:3)
27. "The wicked is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous will come through trouble." (Proverbs 12:13)
28. "Righteousness guards him whose way is blameless, but wickedness overthrows the sinner." (Proverbs 13:8)
29. "The righteous eats to the satisfying of his soul, but the stomach of the wicked shall be in want." (Proverbs 13:25)
30. "In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but in the revenue of the wicked is trouble." (Proverbs 15:6)
31. "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil." (Proverbs 15:28)
32. "The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous." (Proverbs 15:29)
33. "It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness." (Proverbs 16:12)
34. "A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity." (Proverbs 24:16)
35. "A righteous man who falters before the wicked is like a murky spring and a polluted well." (Proverbs 25:26)
36. "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion." (Proverbs 28:1)
37. "When the righteous rejoice, there is great glory; but when the wicked arise, men hide themselves." (Proverbs 28:12)
38. "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan." (Proverbs 29:2)
39. "The righteous considers the cause of the poor, but the wicked does not understand such knowledge." (Proverbs 29:7)
40. "When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increases; but the righteous will see their fall." (Proverbs 29:16)

There are forty Proverbs that speak directly to the contrast between the righteous and the wicked. Seven summary statements about these Proverbs will bring the issue into clearer focus.

1. The righteous person moves through life with a sense of confidence and security because he or she is guided by integrity. (Proverbs 11:3 - #16)
2. The righteous person is blessed with a powerful sense of satisfaction in life because his or her work produces peace within knowing he or she has done what is right. (Proverbs 10:16 - #7)
3. The righteous person will probably be blessed with having to make far fewer apologies than the wicked because he or she speaks with wisdom. (Proverbs 10:20, 31, 32 - #8, 14, 15)
4. The righteous enjoys the approval of society because of doing what is right and good and to the benefit of his or her fellow-human beings. (Proverbs 11:10, 11; 16:12; 28:12; 29:2, 7 - #20, 21, 33, 37, 38, 39)
5. The righteous person has a powerful effect on society whereas the wicked acts in a way that multiplies iniquity wherever he or she lives. (Proverbs 29:16 - #40)
6. The righteous person's life is directed by his or her own right relationship with God in contrast to the wicked whose unrighteousness leads to their downfall. (Proverbs 11:5 - #17)
7. The righteous person will enjoy the benefits of God's protection and provision because his or her ways are pleasing to God. (Proverbs 3:33; 10:2, 3, 6, 24, 28; 11:8; 13:25; 15:6, 29 - #2, 3, 4, 9, 11, 19, 29, 30, 32)

From a cursory reading of many of the forty proverbs used for this study one could become quite disillusioned, confused and discouraged. This is because it seems there are some promises made in some of the proverbs that just do not materialize in the Christian's life. Therefore, what should be one's approach to these proverbs? These are not ironclad promises from God. They were written primarily to and for Israel in the days of King Solomon. But, from them we learn! They were set forth as standards for living under God's control as nation of people ... and for us. Israel knew well the realities of life that at times wicked people seemed to prosper. Why would this be so? Israel needed to remember an additional word penned by King Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes:

"Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God." (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13)

Therefore, the Prophets of God, as well as the Kings of Israel who knew God, loved God and obeyed God knew well that any success experienced and/or enjoyed by the wicked was only temporary. The consequence of this confidence in God was the firm conviction that the righteous should not worry about the temporary success of the wicked. This is why King Solomon penned these words:

"Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked; for there will be no prospect for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out." (Proverbs 24:19-20; NKJV)

In other words, the Old Testament Prophets of God took the long view and believed that patient faithfulness would one day be rewarded. Even when righteousness seemed to meet with misfortune, they knew that though the righteous person may fall many times he or she could still get up and succeed and live the life God intended.

A final question that needs to be addressed is: What IS righteousness? Very simply it is the practice of doing what is right. Or it might be said this way: What God wants done gets done. But how does one know what is right? Or how does one know what God wants done? I want to suggest three answers to this question. Answer number one is: Search the Scriptures; live in the Word of God; meditate, pray, memorize, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide, to lead, and to instruct." Answer number two is: "Seek the counsel of Christian people whose lives are living witnesses to the grace, love, and power of God." Answer number three is from the heart and mind of a precious lady in history. When John Wesley was in his early days in college he inquired of his mother, Susannah Wesley, mother of 19 children, as to how to know what is right or wrong for his life. He was caught up in an environment of various kinds of social activities that were obviously pleasurable, but at the same time troublesome to him. Her wise counsel is recorded as follows: "Would you judge the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasure? Take this rule: whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things – that thing is sin for you, however innocent it may be in itself."

Perhaps we question the validity of an optimistic view of righteousness and wickedness. We have learned that the Bible declares that the righteous ought to succeed and the wicked ought to suffer. Yet experience does not always bear that out, even when patience is given plenty of time. We sometimes fail to recognize that the Proverbs are general observations about how life is supposed to work. They are designed to instruct and motivate people concerning right behavior. They are NOT legal guarantees about how every person can manipulate life to achieve whatever he or she may want to see happen. When Proverbs are correctly understood then the observations of the ancient Prophets of God are found to be true. As a general rule the lives of righteous people are more successful, happier and better than those of the wicked. Yet there are exceptions to this. Some wicked people never seem to be confronted with the consequences of their evil and righteous people never seem to enjoy very many material benefits. When you observe this, remember Ecclesiastes 8:11-13, as quoted earlier. Also remember that one day ... whenever that day will be in the timing of God, the words of Job 3:17 will come true: "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest."

When it seems that the oppressing unrighteousness ... the terrible wickedness that is everywhere ... is overwhelming, prayerfully let the reassuring words of this song by Bill Gaither be a rich source of blessing and encouragement.

JOY COMES IN THE MORNING

1. If you've knelt beside the rubble of an aching broken heart
When the things you gave your life to fell apart
You're not the first to be acquainted with sorrow, grief or pain
But the master promised sunshine after rain

CHORUS

Hold on my child joy comes in the morning
Weeping only last for the night
Hold on my child Joy comes in the morning
The darkest hour means dawn is just in sight

2. To invest your sees of trust in God in mountains you can't move
You have risked your life on things you cannot prove
But to give the things you cannot keep for what you cannot lose
Now, that's the way to find the joy God has for you.

With that these seven somewhat instructional, and probably more academic than inspirational Devotionals from the Book of Proverbs come a close. They do so with my prayer that the essence of the these teachings in the Book of Proverbs will lodge solidly in the hearts of all who read and meditate on them, and ask the Holy Spirit to transform them into reality in life's daily experiences.