

The Appeal of Wisdom

The invitation to take hold of the wisdom that comes from above is universal. It is expressed in two ways in the book of Proverbs. First, we read of a father inviting his son to take heed to his words: *“My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings”* (4:20). Second, we read of wisdom personified extending the invitation for all to come, learn, and become wise: *“Does not wisdom call, and understanding lift up her voice? [...] ‘To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O naive ones, understand prudence; and, O fools, understand wisdom. Listen, for I will speak noble things...’* (8:1, 4-6).

The Father’s Appeal

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man” (3:1-4).

An earlier statement in the book is similar to this: *“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching”* (1:8). The earlier passage introduces the father’s specific instruction about friendships and evil influences that

will be considered later in our study. The above passage (3:1-4) is more general; so for our purposes we will begin with it.

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments” (3:1). The father’s instruction that his son *“not forget”* his teaching implies that his son had already been taught. The father is simply *reminding* his son of what he has instructed previously. The father’s invitation then is for the son to *hear* and *accept* his teaching, *retain* his teaching (*“not forget”*), and *apply* his teaching (*“keep my commandments”*).

“For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you” (3:2). Why should the son listen to his father’s instruction? He should listen, not just because of the authority his father has over him, but because he will benefit from heeding his father’s command. The children of Israel were told, *“Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the Lord your God gives you”* (Deuteronomy 5:16). Similarly, the wise man tells his son that by *accepting, retaining, and applying* his teaching, he will be blessed for many years. This, of course, is *generally, not absolutely, true.*

“Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart” (3:3). The father again tells his son to *retain* his instructions. In this verse, he tells him to do this in two ways. To *“bind them around your neck”* suggests an outward manifestation of the son’s retention of his father’s teaching (actions, words). To *“write them on the tablet of your heart”* describes how his father’s instructions were to govern his inward being (thoughts, motives). The point is that the

wisdom the father imparts to his son, and the wisdom found throughout the book of Proverbs, is for the *whole* man (actions, words, thoughts, and motives).

“So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man” (3:4). The father mentions a twofold benefit of following his words of wisdom. First, his son would *“find favor...in the sight of God.”* As previously noted, a healthy *“fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”* (1:7) and *“wisdom”* (9:10). One must follow after divine wisdom to be pleasing to God. Second, his son would be of *“good repute in the sight of...man.”* The application of the wisdom imparted by this father and discussed throughout the book of Proverbs is practical and can be easily seen and will be respected by others.

Wisdom’s Appeal

“Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings: ‘How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Turn to my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; and you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will

call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof. So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. But he who listens to me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil” (1:20-33).

This is the first of three passages we will be considering in which the wise man personifies wisdom and describes her *appealing* to man to take heed to her.

“Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings” (1:20-21). The fact that Wisdom is being described as shouting and crying out in the *street*, in the *square*, at the head of the *noisy streets*, and at the *entry gates* to the city is meant to show us that the call of Wisdom is made *publicly* and *openly* to all. Yet there is no mention of a crowd gathering around, eager to learn from the one proclaiming wisdom; only an inattentive refusal to receive wisdom (1:24-25). The lesson is that though Wisdom calls to all, not all will obtain wisdom. Therefore, if one does not grow in wisdom, it is because he has *rejected* wisdom, not because wisdom was inaccessible to him. We have already noticed the father imparting wisdom to his son (3:1-4). What if there is no father to impart wisdom? What if the father is unwilling or unable to teach his son? Though the son in such situations would certainly be at a disadvantage,

there is still wisdom to be gained as it is calling out to all, openly and freely.

“How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing and fools hate knowledge?” (1:22). Incredibly, there are many people who prefer life without wisdom – at least the *divine* wisdom that is being offered to them here. They *“love being simple-minded”* and *“hate knowledge.”* We often hear the phrase, *“ignorance is bliss.”* To those who are willingly foolish and naive, this is their motto. They know just enough about the wisdom that invites them that they have convinced themselves that they want no part of it. Instead they *“delight themselves in scoffing,”* preferring to ridicule and mock rather than learn and grow. But why would so many people prefer simple-mindedness and foolishness over the wisdom that comes from above? Solomon gives an answer to this in the next verse.

“Turn to my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you” (1:23). For one to abandon his foolishness in order to take hold of wisdom, he must first receive *reproof*. He must be shown how he is in error so that he can make correction and follow what is right. This key component in gaining wisdom – *reproof* – is uncomfortable and undesirable to many. People do not want to have their faults pointed out to them and be told that they must now do something differently. This is why many reject divine wisdom. As we will discuss more in depth later in this study, we can infer from this passage that we must be willing to listen to reproof, admit wrong, and make corrections in our lives. If we are willing to do these things, Wisdom says she *will* pour out her spirit on us and make her words known to us. If we apply

ourselves to wisdom with the proper attitude, we *will* be able to acquire it.

“Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; and you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof” (1:24-25). God never forces anyone to hear, learn, obey, or grow. We must *choose* to do those things. In the same way, the wisdom that comes down from above will not be forced upon us. Wisdom will *call*, but we can *refuse*. We are free to *choose* to pay no attention to the appeal of Wisdom. But there will be consequences, as they are mentioned in the verses that follow.

“I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you” (1:26-27). Wisdom is described as *laughing* and *mocking* when trouble comes to those who refused to listen. To us, this may seem a little harsh. But it is no more harsh than the fool’s rejection of the appeal that was made to him by Wisdom. Also, it is important to note that this *calamity* is spoken of as a certainty. The text does not say Wisdom will mock *if* dread and distress come; it says that Wisdom will mock *when* dread and distress come. There are negative consequences that come as a result of one rejecting Wisdom. The timing and severity of these consequences will vary, but the fact that they *will* come is a certainty.

“Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof” (1:28-30). We might wonder: if Wisdom was

previously crying out, why will she refuse to answer when these people start calling on her and diligently seeking her? The reason is because *“they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord.”* They rejected the *counsel* and *reproof* of wisdom. We might then wonder: does God not allow one who had previously rejected Him and His wisdom to repent? Of course He does (cf. Ezekiel 18:32; 2 Peter 3:9). But even if one repents, he will still have to face the negative consequences of the choices he made prior to his repentance. Therefore, since these individuals rejected the wisdom that could have prevented their calamity, even a penitent heart would not deliver them from the *physical consequences* of their prior decisions. Acquiring wisdom is a process. If we forsake the appeal of Wisdom until we need wisdom, it will be too late. We must grow in wisdom *now* in order to prepare for the future.

“So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them” (1:31-32). When calamity comes, those who rejected Wisdom will have to suffer the consequences of their rejection. The seed that they sowed in foolishness will bear fruit. Those who rejected Wisdom will eat of this fruit (experience the negative consequences of their choices) and be *satiated*. This means they would be filled to the point of disgust, just as when one becomes sick from eating too much of an unhealthy food. The *“waywardness of the naive”* brings about death, reminding us again that ignorance is *not* bliss. The *complacency*, or *prosperity* (KJV), of fools brings destruction. As long as they are content in their foolishness and naivete, they will develop no desire to seek after wisdom.

“But he who listens to me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil” (1:33). Just as there are negative consequences for rejecting Wisdom, there is also a reward for accepting Wisdom. More of the benefits of wisdom will be discussed later in the study. But here Solomon tells us that those who listen to the words of Wisdom will enjoy *security* and *peace* from the threat of calamity that would be against those who rejected Wisdom.

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“Does not wisdom call, and understanding lift up her voice? On top of the heights beside the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates, at the opening to the city, at the entrance of the doors, she cries out: ‘To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O naive ones, understand prudence; and, O fools, understand wisdom. Listen, for I will speak noble things; and the opening of my lips will reveal right things. For my mouth will utter truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverted in them. They are all straightforward to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge. Take my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her” (8:1-11).

This second passage describing Wisdom’s appeal to man contains an invitation that explains, in general terms, the teachings of Wisdom. It also introduces the value of wisdom.

“Does not wisdom call, and understanding lift up her voice? On top of the heights beside the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates, at the opening to the city, at the entrance of the doors, she cries out” (8:1-3). The question in the first verse is rhetorical. Of course Wisdom calls and lifts her voice. As we have already noticed, this call is made *publicly*, indicating that it is open to all (cf. 1:20-21).

“To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O naive ones, understand prudence; and, O fools, understand wisdom” (8:4-5). This further emphasizes the need for all to take heed unto the call of Wisdom. The wisdom that comes from above is intended for *“the sons of men.”* God expects people to gain wisdom and has made it so that all are able to do so. It is designed to give prudence and wisdom to those who are naive and foolish. Calling these ones *naive* and *foolish* is not meant to be an insult. Certainly all people, at some point in their lives, have a time when they are naive and foolish simply because they have not yet learned what they need to know. The point is that we should not *remain* in a state of naivete and foolishness.

“Listen, for I will speak noble things; and the opening of my lips will reveal right things. For my mouth will utter truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverted in them” (8:6-8). The wisdom that comes from above is different from the wisdom of the world (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:20-21). Because man is fallible, the wisdom of the world is fallible. Paul would later write, *“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God”* (1 Corinthians 3:19). In contrast, because God is *infallible*, the wisdom that comes from above is *perfect*. As Wisdom describes her teaching, we see a

perfect message that has come from an *infallible* being. Wisdom speaks of things which are *noble* and *right* (3:6). The word translated *noble* or *excellent* (KJV) is used elsewhere to describe those in positions of civil or military power. It indicates that the words of Wisdom are *superior* over the worldly wisdom that is contrary to it. The lips of Wisdom speak *truth* and not *wickedness* (3:7). The teachings of Wisdom are wholly *righteous*, containing no hint of any error or foolishness (3:8).

“They are all straightforward to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge” (8:9). The previous verses describe the sayings of Wisdom as being wholly noble, right, true, and righteous. However, not everyone is going to accept the wisdom that comes from above as being these things. Many follow the wisdom of the world, believing it is more noble, right, true, and righteous than the wisdom that comes from above. Why do some reject godly wisdom for worldly wisdom? It is because they do not understand or have knowledge. One who truly understands and appreciates the difference between the two types of wisdom will always choose to follow after the wisdom that comes from above. Those who follow the wisdom of the world either do not *know* the wisdom that comes from God, or they have not put forth enough of an effort to *understand* it.

“Take my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her” (8:10-11). We will discuss more later in the study about the value of wisdom. The idea is introduced to us here. Those things which man values in this life – silver, gold, jewels, and any other desirable possession – cannot compare with the wisdom that comes from above. Therefore, Wisdom calls us to listen to her

instruction and gain the *knowledge* that will lead one to acquire wisdom.

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“Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; she has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table; she has sent out her maidens, she calls from the tops of the heights of the city: ‘Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!’ To him who lacks understanding she says, ‘Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake your folly and live, and proceed in the way of understanding’” (9:1-6).

The final passage we will notice that describes Wisdom’s appeal presents a picture of wisdom making preparations to host a feast and inviting others to attend.

“Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; she has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table; she has sent out her maidens, she calls from the tops of the heights of the city” (9:1-3). The fact that Wisdom has built a house, as opposed to pitching a tent, indicates that it is firmly established. The *seven* pillars indicate *completeness*, that it is lacking in nothing. Preparations are made for this feast, and the invitations are sent. The call for men to attend the feast is done *“from the tops of the heights of the city,”* again, indicates a *public* invitation that is made to *all* (cf. 1:20-21; 8:2-3).

“Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!’ To him who lacks understanding she says, ‘Come, eat of my food and drink of

the wine I have mixed. Forsake your folly and live, and proceed in the way of understanding” (9:4-6). The invitation is directed to those who are *naïve* and who *lack understanding*. Of course, all who lack wisdom from above need to answer this call. But one must be *humble* enough to recognize the fact that he is *naïve* and lacking in understanding. Those who are rebellious or arrogant, though they are in need of godly wisdom, will not answer the call because they do not believe that they need it. We must be able to acknowledge our shortcomings and humbly seek after this wisdom. After one humbly receives wise instruction, he must repent (*forsake his folly*) and do the will of God (*proceed in the way of understanding*). It will not do any good for one to *learn* of the right way, then fail to give up his wickedness and follow after what is right. *Acquiring* wisdom must necessarily result in one *applying* wisdom. Most of the book of Proverbs is devoted to this *application* of wisdom.

The Timeless Nature of Wisdom

After considering the *appeal* of wisdom – both from a father and from Wisdom itself – it is important to consider whether or not this same wisdom is good for us today. The wisdom we are considering in the book of Proverbs is not *worldly* wisdom but wisdom that comes from above. As Solomon explains in the following passage, godly wisdom will *never* become obsolete or irrelevant. For this reason, Wisdom also appeals to us.

“The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. From everlasting I was established, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. When there were no depths I was

brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills I was brought forth; while He had not yet made the earth and the fields, nor the first dust of the world. When He established the heavens, I was there, when He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, when He made firm the skies above, when the springs of the deep became fixed, when He set for the sea its boundary so that the water would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth; then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men.

“Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, for blessed are they who keep my ways. Heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love death” (8:22-36).

Wisdom is timeless. It existed before, during, and after the Creation. The wise man explains here why this is important.

“The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old” (8:22). Wisdom is speaking here, reminding us that the wisdom we are considering is not the worldly wisdom of man. Therefore, the wisdom that we are to pursue is older than the world itself. It belongs to God, not to

man; so we must look to God and to what He has revealed in order to acquire this wisdom.

“From everlasting I was established, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth” (8:23). There are three periods of time mentioned in this verse. First, there is the time *before* Creation (“*from everlasting*”). Second, there is the time of the Creation (“*from the beginning*”). Finally, there is the time in which man has inhabited the earth (“*from the earliest times of the earth*”) – which has been since the sixth day at the end of the Creation week, right before God “*completed His work*” and “*rested on the seventh day*” (Genesis 1:26-2:2). This means that divine wisdom predates any human society or culture. Man often takes pride in how the culture in which he is a part has grown and progressed throughout generations, gaining collective wisdom along the way. Much of this wisdom, though, is *worldly* wisdom. *Godly* wisdom came before all of this, and so it is independent of human reasoning. Therefore, what may be considered “*common sense*” or some enlightened realization by a particular society – even our modern society – is not necessarily true or wise. True wisdom existed since before Creation, during the Creation, and from the beginning of man. In the following verses, Solomon expands on these time periods.

“Before the mountains...before the hills...while He had not yet made the earth...nor the first dust of the world” (8:24-25). Before “*the beginning*” in which “*God created the heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1), God “*brought forth*” wisdom. This Wisdom that appeals to us to “*listen*” (8:32) is older than time. Therefore, we should not expect it to change with time.

“When He established the heavens...when He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, when He made firm the skies...when the springs of the deep became fixed, when He set for the sea its boundary...when He marked out the foundations of the earth” (8:27-29). Wisdom existed with God prior to Creation, then was used by God in creating the heavens and the earth. These verses describe that work of Creation. All that was created and continues to be sustained by His providence is a testament to the wisdom of God.

“Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men” (8:30-31). Wisdom is closely connected to God’s work in Creation, being *“beside Him,”* with Him *“daily,”* and *“always before Him.”* This suggests that for us to possess true wisdom, we must acknowledge God as the Creator. To reject Him as the Creator is to reject the wisdom that existed *“beside Him, as a master workman.”* At the end, we learn that Wisdom’s *“delight [is] with the sons of men”* (KJV). This wisdom exists for our benefit. The creation and subsequent providence, which are grounded in wisdom, are for our good. The divine message of wisdom that is revealed from above is for our good as well. As we continue this study, we will see many ways in which wisdom benefits those who follow after it.

“Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, for blessed are they who keep my ways. Heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it” (8:32-33). Similar to what we have already noticed, Wisdom invites all to *listen, heed,* and become wise. Following this type of instruction must invariably lead to obedience. If we keep the ways of wisdom, we will be blessed. Conversely, if we neglect the ways of wisdom, then not only can we not

expect the blessings, but we can expect negative consequences for this neglect. Not only must we gain wisdom, but we must regularly be reminded of the things which we have been taught so that, as the Hebrew writer stated, *“we do not drift away from it”* (Hebrews 2:1).

“Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord” (8:34-35). To be blessed we must *listen* to the words of Wisdom. Furthermore, we must exhibit patience and a willingness to wait daily upon Wisdom’s instruction. Wisdom will never be obtained overnight. Therefore, we must diligently study so that we can have her teachings firmly planted in our minds. If we do this and follow after this wisdom, then we will find life and the Lord’s favor.

“But he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love death” (8:36). While there are certainly benefits to following Wisdom, there are also negative consequences for rejecting her. When we forsake the wisdom that comes from above, we bring harm to ourselves and demonstrate that we *“love death.”*

The next section of our study will focus on the good that is gained and the evil that is avoided by following Wisdom so that we might develop a proper *appreciation* of wisdom.

The Appreciation of Wisdom

We have already considered passages discussing the *appeal* of wisdom, calling us to gain the instruction and insight necessary to acquire wisdom. But why should we answer this call? There are many invitations that may be offered that are disregarded by those who are invited. Why should we listen to the *appeal of wisdom*? It is because of the great value of wisdom, the rewards that come from following wisdom, and the perils that we face when we reject wisdom.

All of these are pointed out to us in the book of Proverbs. When God offers His wisdom which was with Him from the beginning (8:22), He does not expect us to accept it without explaining *why* we should accept it. So let us consider the reasons why we should *appreciate* wisdom so we will heed the *appeal* of wisdom.

The Value of Wisdom

The first reason why we should *appreciate* wisdom is the inherent *value* of wisdom. But before we can consider the value of wisdom, we must begin with the starting point for pursuing wisdom – truth.

“Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding” (23:23).

We must first recognize that *truth* is more valuable than anything of a material nature which we could buy or sell. We should not understand truth to mean something subjective that will change from one person, time, region, or circumstance to another. Truth is the objective standard that has been revealed from God. It is the *word* of God (cf. Psalm 119:160; John 17:17).

Truth – the revealed word of God – is the starting point that leads to wisdom. The wise man also mentions *instruction* and *understanding* as coming from truth. This tells us three things about truth (the word of God):

1. It leads to divine wisdom.
2. It is the basis for all instruction in matters that pertain to God.
3. It can be understood.

Those who look for wisdom apart from the truth of God's word are seeking the wrong kind of wisdom. Those who use a standard of authority other than the truth of God's word for their religious practices and doctrines are in error. Those who believe that the truth of God's word cannot be understood are mistaken.

Truth leads to instruction. Instruction leads to understanding. Then understanding leads to wisdom. When man produces a product to be sold, the fair market value of it is always worth *more* than the sum total of the raw materials used to make it. Truth – God's word – is valuable. The psalmist described the words of God as being “*more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb*” (Psalm 19:10). How much more valuable is

the wisdom that comes from a proper understanding and practice of the truth. The following passages help us to understand just how valuable the wisdom that comes from above is.

“Take my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her” (8:10-11).

“Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, and my yield better than choicest silver” (8:18-19).

“How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver” (16:16).

The first two passages have Wisdom speaking, and the third contains a statement from the wise man about wisdom. The point is clear: wisdom is far more valuable than any riches of this world. Throughout history, gold, silver, and jewels have had a great value associated with them. It is natural, then, to see these as having great worth. But no matter how valuable these are, they *“cannot compare”* with divine wisdom. If we are to gain wisdom, we must value it so highly that we will not let even gold, silver, or jewels distract us from its pursuit.

The Rewards of Wisdom

Wisdom is not valuable simply because it has been arbitrarily declared to be valuable. It is valuable because of the

rewards that come for following after it.

“How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew.

“My son, let them not vanish from your sight; keep sound wisdom and discretion, so they will be life to your soul and adornment to your neck. Then you will walk in your way securely and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden fear nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught” (3:13-26).

The one who finds wisdom and gains understanding is *blessed* (3:13). But how so? The wise man explains how wisdom causes one to be blessed.

“For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her” (3:14-15). As we

have already noticed, wisdom is of far greater value than the material things of this life. Of all the things we might desire, wisdom will prove to be far more valuable as a long-term investment. Elsewhere, in contrasting the wise and the foolish, the wise man writes, “A man will be *satisfied* with good by the fruit of his words, and the deeds of a man’s hands will return to him” (12:14). We will be *satisfied* when we apply ourselves to wisdom and reap its fruits. Therefore, we should pursue it.

“Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor” (3:16). One of the benefits of wisdom, generally, is *long life*, as our lives are not cut short through foolish choices and activities. When we pursue the things that lead to wisdom – righteousness, humility, and the fear of the Lord – we find “*riches, honor and life*” (22:4; cf. 21:21). A few chapters later, Wisdom says, “*For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you*” (9:11). Riches and honor are also often byproducts of one’s *acquisition and application* of wisdom. Wisdom says she will “*endow those who love me with wealth, that I may fill their treasuries*” (8:21; cf. 24:3-4).

“Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace” (3:17). Following after wisdom leads to pleasant and peaceful paths for life. Later, Solomon writes, “*The path of life leads upward for the wise that he may keep away from Sheol below*” (15:24). *Upward* is in the direction of heaven and the dwelling place of God. Therefore, the wisdom that comes from above shows us the way to reach God in heaven.

“She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast” (3:18). In the beginning, man’s access to the tree of life was lost because of sin (Genesis 3:22-24). Wisdom is now “*a tree of life*” for those who follow

after her because, as we noticed in the previous verse, divine wisdom leads us back to heaven where the tree of life (eternal life) can be found (cf. Revelation 22:2). Elsewhere, the wise man writes, *“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life”* (11:30). That which is produced by a life of righteousness, guided by the wisdom that comes from above, is eternal life.

“The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew” (3:19-20). This echoes the point that was made in the section titled *The Timeless Nature of Wisdom* (pp. 22-26). Wisdom existed with God from before the Creation and was used by Him in creating the heavens and earth (8:22-29).

“My son, let them not vanish from your sight; keep sound wisdom and discretion” (3:21). The father appeals to his son to keep hold of godly wisdom and understanding. It is not enough for his son to just listen and learn; he also needs to *retain* what he learned.

“So they will be life to your soul and adornment to your neck” (3:22). The father is encouraging his son to be clothed with wisdom and discretion. These teachings are to be *“a graceful wreath to [his] head and ornaments about [his] neck”* (1:9). In speaking of Wisdom, the father tells his son: *“Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty”* (4:8-9). As one is clothed with wisdom and discretion, he obtains *life* for his soul (cf. 12:28).

“Then you will walk in your way securely and your foot will not stumble” (3:23). One of the benefits of wisdom is the

security and stability that one enjoys in life, as opposed to the volatile and uncertain life of one who rejects divine wisdom. *“He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out”* (10:9).

“When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet” (3:24). This verse mentions two benefits of wisdom. First, wisdom offers *security* [see previous verse]. Second, following after divine wisdom allows one to have a good conscience, thus making his sleep *sweet*.

“Do not be afraid of sudden fear nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught” (3:25-26). Even though one may be walking according to God’s wisdom, there will be enemies that will rise up. However, if we follow after wisdom, we should take courage. There is *strength* in wisdom. *“A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increases power”* (24:5). *“A wise man scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust”* (21:22). Why is there such strength in wisdom? It is because this wisdom comes from the Lord. He is our *confidence*. As long as we stand with Him, we can be assured of triumph.

* * *

“For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things; from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who delight in doing evil and rejoice in the perversity of

evil; whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways; to deliver you from the strange woman, from the adulteress who flatters with her words; that leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death and her tracks lead to the dead; none who go to her return again, nor do they reach the paths of life.

“So you will walk in the way of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will live in the land and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land and the treacherous will be uprooted from it” (2:10-22).

Wisdom not only provides us with blessings for following it, but it also delivers us from evil. This is, of course, if we store up wisdom. Just before the passage above, the wise man says, *“He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity” (2:7)*. The protection that comes with wisdom can only be realized if we pursue it. So these verses that talk about wisdom delivering us from evil assume that we have first *acquired* it. We will discuss the *acquisition* of wisdom later in the study. But understanding these benefits of wisdom shows us *why* we should work to acquire it.

“For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you” (2:10-11). A superficial knowledge of the instructions of the wise will not deliver us from anything. Wisdom must enter our hearts and souls if we want it to guard and watch over us. Therefore, we must be *“attentive to wisdom” (2:2)* and retain it in our innermost being. Only then can we expect wisdom to deliver us from evil and

prevent us from doing things we will later regret.

“To deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things; from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who delight in doing evil and rejoice in the perversity of evil; whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways” (2:12-15). In delivering us *“from the way of evil,”* wisdom is designed to protect us from the influence of those who would lead us in the *“way of evil.”* The first of these that the wise man mentions is *“the man who speaks perverse things.”* This is the man who will try to lead us into sin by false teaching, lies, or verbal attacks. Second, we are warned about *“those who leave the paths of uprightness.”* They take pleasure in doing evil and will deviously try to lead others to follow after them. We are not to follow them or fall prey to them.

“To deliver you from the strange woman, from the adulteress who flatters with her words; that leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death and her tracks lead to the dead; none who go to her return again, nor do they reach the paths of life” (2:16-19). Wisdom also helps to deliver us from the dangers of the *“strange woman,”* or the *“adulteress.”* Much more attention is given to her later in the book of Proverbs (5:1-14; 6:24-35; 7:1-27; 9:13-18), and we will consider her more in a different part of our study. But we are told here that by following wisdom, we can avoid the ruin and damnation that comes from following the adulteress.

“So you will walk in the way of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous” (2:20). If we avoid the *“way of evil”* (2:12) and those who would lead us down that path,

naturally we should expect to *“walk in the way of good men.”* We are going to keep company with one group of people – either the righteous or the wicked. Wisdom and righteousness are inseparable from one another. As wisdom delivers us from evil, it leads us in *“the paths of the righteous.”*

“For the upright will live in the land and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land and the treacherous will be uprooted from it” (2:21-22). The wise man reminds us at the end of this section of God’s blessings and punishment. Those who through the instructions of wisdom live uprightly will be blessed. Those who reject wisdom and pursue wickedness will be rooted up.

* * *

“Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law” (29:18).

The *vision* to which the wise man refers is the *revelation* (NKJV) that comes down from above, instructing us in godly wisdom. Without God’s instructions, man is *“unrestrained.”* Without His standard, there is no real standard for man to follow. While many foolishly believe that the absence of a divine standard is desirable, following the *“way which seems right to a man”* only leads to *“death”* (14:12; 16:25). One is *happy*, or *blessed*, if he *“keeps the law”* that has been delivered by divine revelation. Pursuing God’s wisdom is for our benefit. Therefore, we must *trust God* and not ourselves and follow Him in all things.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones” (3:5-8).

The Perils of Wickedness

After considering the value of wisdom, the rewards of wisdom, and the deliverance from evil that wisdom provides, we will next consider the *perils of wickedness* to further reinforce what we have already learned: embracing and following the wisdom that comes from above is for our good.

The *perils of wickedness* can be divided into three categories: hardship in life, lack of hope for the future, and the inevitability of judgment.

“Good understanding produces favor, but the way of the treacherous is hard” (13:15).

The first peril of wickedness is *hardship in life*. People often complain about the way of God being difficult to follow. In one sense it is (cf. Matthew 7:13-14), but the path of wickedness contains hardships that can be avoided if one will simply follow what is right. The hardships that come as a result of one rejecting God's wisdom are unnecessary and avoidable.

“His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin. He will die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he will go

astray” (5:22-23). One of the lies of sin is to convince us that we are still in control, rather than sin becoming master over us. But sins (*iniquities*) capture, or bind, us. Paul later wrote, “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). When we pursue sin, rather than righteousness or divine wisdom, we become *slaves* of sin. The end result is that we “die for lack of instruction.” This shows us that God’s *instruction* teaches us to repudiate sin. Many believe that sin is tolerable because it cannot cause a child of God to be lost. This idea is false. The word of God plainly teaches us to avoid sin (cf. Titus 2:12). Therefore, if one ignores this instruction and chooses to live without it, he will be captured by his iniquities, which will ultimately result in death – either physical death (as is Solomon’s primary point) or, as we extend the application, spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

“A worthless person, a wicked man, is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who points with his fingers; who with perversity in his heart continually spreads strife. Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing” (6:12-15). The actions described here refer to one who is a troublemaker and intent upon spreading strife among brethren. When one acts corruptly like this, the wise man says that his calamity that will result from his wickedness will be unexpected, coming *suddenly* and *instantly*. He may be able to deceive himself into thinking there is no cause for concern – and many who follow after wickedness will do this, causing their own consciences to become *seared* (1 Timothy 4:2) – but trouble will eventually come for him.

“If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you scoff, you alone will bear it” (9:12). This reminds us of the principle of *personal responsibility*. When one rejects divine wisdom and acts wickedly, he will not be able to blame anyone else for his actions or the consequences of those actions.

“When a wicked man comes, contempt also comes, and with dishonor comes scorn” (18:3). As one rejects God's wisdom and follows after sin, he becomes known by others for his character and his actions. Though one may believe he will help *himself* by engaging in sin (and all sin is fundamentally rooted in selfishness), his actions will produce a reputation about him; and that reputation will result in dishonor and contempt. He will be seen as *“an abomination to men”* (24:8-9).

“Also it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, and he who hurries his footsteps errs. The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the Lord” (19:2-3). Rejecting truth and wisdom is rebellion against God. This leads to *ruin* for the one who rejected wise counsel. This is why *“it is not good for a person to be without knowledge.”* Therefore, instead of *hurrying* to act, which often causes one to *err* from the truth and suffer the consequences, it is good to stop in order to listen, consider, and learn. It is the same principle that James emphasized: *“Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God”* (James 1:19-20).

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, how much more when he brings it with evil intent!” (21:27). Besides being *“an abomination to men”* (24:9), the wicked man is an abomination to God. Further, his *“sacrifice...is an abomination.”* God will not be pleased with what he offers and will not

accept him. No amount of sacrifice will please God when it comes from one who refuses to obey Him. Samuel told Saul, *“Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice”* (1 Samuel 15:22). The wicked man being discussed in this verse is not penitent; he continues to rebel against God and choose his own way over the paths of wisdom. Therefore, his sacrifice is an abomination to God. Any *“evil intent”* in his heart only compounds the problem.

“A man who is laden with the guilt of human blood will be a fugitive until death; let no one support him” (28:17). Time does not bring forgiveness. Unless and until one meets the divine condition for forgiveness (repentance), his sins are still held against him, no matter how much time has passed. The wise man encourages us to not support such a one who is in sin and refuses to repent. Of course, we should be ready to help turn him back to the truth if possible (11:30); but as long as he remains in his sin, he is worthy of no support.

* * *

“Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked; for there will be no future for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out” (24:19-20).

The second peril of wickedness is a *lack of hope for the future*. Any *“benefit”* that comes from following wickedness and worldly wisdom is only temporary. The Hebrew writer talked about Moses who forsook *“the passing pleasures of sin”* (Hebrews 11:25). While sin may seem appealing, it is certainly *passing*. There are no long-term benefits for sin.

“He who troubles his own house will inherit wind, and the foolish will be servant to the wisehearted” (11:29). The Bible reminds us that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). The prophet Hosea said, *“For they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind”* (Hosea 8:7). For all the effort of the wicked man, his labors are only futile and destructive. Those who are closest to him (*“his own house”*) will also have to suffer the consequences of his actions. The wise man then tells of the foolish serving the wise, pointing to the future exaltation of the righteous and humbling of the wicked. He says elsewhere: *“The evil will bow down before the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous”* (14:19).

“A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead” (21:16). This verse does not address those who never learned God’s word. Instead, it is about those who are taught the truth, understand it, and then forsake it. Despite once being *in* the way of understanding, the one who rejects and leaves the truth has a future of damnation awaiting him if he does not return to the truth.

“He who sows iniquity will reap vanity, and the rod of his fury will perish” (22:8). We have already noticed the principle that we reap what we sow (11:29). When one sows the seeds of sin, what might we expect him to reap? There are certainly consequences in this life (13:15) and the next (Romans 6:23). But instead of focusing on these consequences, the wise man emphasizes the utter futility of sinful pursuits. The seeds of sin, when sown, will reap only that which is vain. *“The rod of his fury”* – his power to do evil – will perish. Anything that is of lasting value comes from one faithfully obeying God and seeking the wisdom that comes from above.

“Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked; for there will be no future for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out” (24:19-20). After noting the fact that the wicked have no future to which they can look forward, Solomon tells us not to fret (worry) over them or envy them. It can be easy to worry and envy when we are too short-sighted to look at matters that extend past this life. Even if we see the wicked prosper in this life, we should not fret over them or envy them. No amount of prosperity in this life can compare to the great worth of the reward promised to those who will be faithful to the Lord (Matthew 16:26).

“When the wicked increase, transgression increases; but the righteous will see their fall” (29:16). Wickedness tends to progress *“from bad to worse”* (2 Timothy 3:13). Sin leads to more sin, which leads to increasingly more difficulties and destruction. But we have a two-fold assurance at the end of this verse. First, the wicked *will* fall. The “benefits” they enjoy from their sins are only temporary. Second, the righteous will *see* the fall of the wicked, implying that the righteous will be spared and will have a future after judgment comes against those who are wicked.

* * *

“Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and blows for the back of fools” (19:29).

The third peril of wickedness is the *inevitability of judgment*. Judgment comes in various forms. One can be judged through the word of God as he is reprovved by it (Hebrews 4:12). One can be judged in that he suffers the physical consequences of his error. One may also be judged by civil authorities when his

wickedness is manifested in his violation of a just law. Finally, one stands to face God in judgment and receive punishment if his deeds are evil.

“On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding” (10:13). The *rod* is a symbol of corrective discipline and is used throughout the book of Proverbs (13:24; 14:3; 22:15; 23:13-14; 26:3; 29:15). One who is *discerning* and displays *wisdom* does not need such correction. One who rejects wisdom and instruction must receive the *rod* in order to convince him to repent. This corrective discipline, when administered appropriately, is a sign that one has been judged as having transgressed the standard of righteousness.

“A rebellious man seeks only evil, so a cruel messenger will be sent against him” (17:11). The *“cruel messenger”* would be one to teach him his lesson for his rebelliousness. This could be done through corrective discipline (cf. 10:13) or through experience as he sees the negative consequences of his behavior. In either case, one who is rebellious must learn that his ways are evil. Therefore, judgments must be made against him.

“A man of great anger will bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again” (19:19). This verse warns us not to waste too much of our time helping those who demonstrate that they have no interest in following the way of truth. There are *penalties* to be paid for sin. (In this case, the sin that is specified is *“great anger”*; but the principle extends to other sins as well.) Each one will suffer for his own sin. If we attempt to save someone – not by turning him away from sin but by trying to remove the negative consequences

for his sin – he will continue to pursue sin and will only need to be rescued again. The judgments that come on account of sin will continue to come as long as one remains unrepentant. Besides the futility of trying to teach one who has no desire to do what is right, we must also be warned about this man's condition. We need to recognize the hopeless and miserable position of the wicked man so that we will not be tempted to follow after him to do evil.

“Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool” (26:1). “Like one who binds a stone in a sling, so is he who gives honor to a fool” (26:8). Rather than allowing the fool to suffer the consequences of his choice to reject God and His wisdom, many try to “shield” those who act foolishly and wickedly from reality. This sometimes seems natural when one does not want to hurt someone's feelings. But these verses describe a step that goes beyond that. More than shielding one from consequences, many try to *bestow honor* upon one who is a fool. Such honor is completely out of place and unhelpful. This is the point of the illustration in verse 8. The word *stone* signifies a “building stone.” A *sling* is from a word meaning “stone heap.” Thus, the idea is of taking a stone that is good and useful for construction and discarding it into a rock pile, such that it becomes covered and unable to be retrieved and used. The good building stone does not belong lodged in the rock pile. In the same way, *honor* does not belong with the fool. Instead, as we have noticed in this portion of our study, hardship, discipline, and judgment belong with the fool.

Those who foolishly follow the path of wickedness will suffer for it. There will be hardships in life. They will have no hope for the future. Those who are wicked stand to face divine judgment – both in this life and beyond – for their wickedness. In the end, it is far better for one to walk in wisdom than to walk after his own way.

The Appreciation of Wisdom

Contrast Between the Righteous and the Wicked

To further emphasize the need for us to *appreciate* wisdom, we will turn our attention now to various passages in the book of Proverbs that highlight the contrast between the righteous and the wicked. We can divide these into two categories: *physical* consequences and *spiritual* consequences. As we consider the following passages, there will be a few that may have application to *both* physical and spiritual consequences; but for our study they will be placed in one category or the other.

Physical Consequences

“What the wicked fears will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous will be granted” (10:24).

Our future is made up of three things: what we desire, what we fear, and what we do not expect. Generally, the righteous can expect some measure of blessing from God for following His will. The wicked can look forward to those things which he fears as the negative consequences for his foolish behavior.

“The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.

Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way, but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the treacherous will be caught by their own greed. When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, and the hope of strong men perishes. The righteous is delivered from trouble, but the wicked takes his place” (11:3-8).

The underlying theme of the above verses is the right way and the wrong way to gain wealth. The righteous man – being guided by his integrity (11:3), understanding the limitations of riches (11:4), and acting blamelessly (11:5) and uprightly (11:6) – will avoid trouble in regard to the riches of this life (11:8). In contrast, the wicked man will be crooked (11:3) in his desire to accumulate wealth. Morality or integrity do not matter because in his greed (11:6); all he has to hope for are the riches of this life (11:7). However, his riches will not profit him when the time comes to suffer the consequences of his misplaced priorities and corrupt practices (11:4).

“The merciful man does himself good, but the cruel man does himself harm. The wicked earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness gets a true reward. He who is steadfast in righteousness will attain life, and he who pursues evil will bring about his own death” (11:17-19).

These verses emphasize the way in which we treat others. Those who are *merciful* and *righteous* toward others will have a reward. Those who are *cruel*, *wicked*, and *evil* in the treatment of others will suffer. The wicked man, though, *deceives* himself,

thinking that he will do himself good by mistreating others. In the short term, this may work out for him. But in the long term, it does not. This is why Solomon says, "*The wicked earns deceptive wages.*" He fools himself into thinking that the short term "benefit" he gets from cheating others is sustainable over the long term. It is not. Jesus would later discuss how we are to treat others when He instituted what we commonly call the "Golden Rule": "*In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets*" (Matthew 7:12).

"A man will be praised according to his insight, but one of perverse mind will be despised" (12:8).

Those who pursue the wisdom that comes from above will gain *insight*. With this comes praise from those who respect God and His wisdom. The "*one of perverse mind*" is he who rejects God's wisdom and walks according to his own way. Those who follow this wisdom, whether through rebelliousness or ignorance, will be *despised* by those who recognize and respect divine wisdom.

"The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked goes out" (13:9).

Light is used to symbolize insight and understanding. It also provides one with a sense of safety and security. The word *rejoices* is derived from a word meaning *to brighten*. Hence, the insight, understanding, safety, and security enjoyed by the righteous man abounds or *shines brightly*. In contrast, the wicked man's lamp (his understanding, insight, safety, and security) is put out.

“The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, but the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded. The teaching of the wise is a foundation of life, to turn aside from the snares of death. Good understanding produces favor, but the way of the treacherous is hard” (13:13-15).

One who fears the Lord and His word, follows the teachings of the wise, and practices righteousness will be rewarded with life and favor. But the one who despises the word of the Lord and walks treacherously will suffer hardships in this life that could have been avoided if he would have just followed the will of God. Several passages make this same point. *“He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, but he who seeks evil, evil will come to him” (11:27). “No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble” (12:21). “Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards himself will be far from them” (22:5).*

“A wicked messenger falls into adversity, but a faithful envoy brings healing” (13:17).

Those who are faithful in bringing the message of truth leading to divine wisdom are a benefit to all those who will hear them. The *“wicked messenger,”* besides providing no help to his audience, also brings trouble upon himself.

“Adversity pursues sinners, but the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity” (13:21).

The wicked man does not just stumble into trouble. Solomon says that trouble *pursues* him, while the righteous enjoys *prosperity*. A similar statement is found a couple of

chapters later: *“Great wealth is in the house of the righteous, but trouble is in the income of the wicked”* (15:6).

“The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the stomach of the wicked is in need” (13:25).

Passages that we have already considered that speak of *wealth* and *prosperity* as being rewards for the righteous should not be interpreted as teaching that following God is a way to obtain riches far above and beyond what most in the world will ever enjoy (cf. 1 Timothy 6:3-5). However, there are blessings for following after righteousness. Jesus would later say, *“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things [the basic necessities of life] will be added to you”* (Matthew 6:33). By avoiding the ways of wickedness and by following the ways of wisdom, the righteous man can be assured of being blessed so that he may *“satisfy his appetite.”* The one who rejects righteousness finds himself *“in need.”* This concept is approached from a different angle in the next chapter. Solomon says, *“The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways, but a good man will be satisfied with his”* (14:14). The righteous man, in both verses, is able to be content with the blessings that come from doing good. The wicked man is *“in need”* of those blessings that are good (13:25), while having *an abundance* of the hardships that come as a consequence of his wickedness (14:14).

“For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity” (24:16).

Even the righteous man will occasionally stumble into sin and have to suffer the consequences for it. But the difference

between the righteous and the wicked is that the righteous man gets back up after stumbling and continues on in the way of truth, whereas the wicked man remains in his sin as the consequences of sin compound against him.

“An arrogant man stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper. He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who walks wisely will be delivered” (28:25-26).

The fundamental difference between the righteous and the wicked is in whom they place their trust. The righteous man *“trusts in the Lord.”* As a result, he *“will be delivered”* (this is true for both his physical and spiritual well-being). The wicked man is *“arrogant”* and foolishly *“trusts in his own heart.”* Therefore, if we are to be righteous and enjoy the rewards of being righteous, we must *trust in the Lord.*

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones” (3:5-8).

Spiritual Consequences

While much of Proverbs deals with matters that pertain to activities of this life and our physical well-being, there are also instructions and principles that extend to our spiritual activities and well-being. We will consider these passages here.

“The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the afflicted. The wise will inherit honor, but fools display dishonor” (3:33-35).

Besides the negative consequences that often exist for wickedness, Solomon tells us that *“the curse of the Lord”* also exists for the wicked. God *scoffs* when judgment comes against those who scoffed at His instruction (cf. 1:24-26). However, the righteous man obtains blessings, grace, and honor from the Lord. Solomon writes elsewhere: *“A good man will obtain favor from the Lord, but He will condemn a man who devises evil” (12:2).*

“The wages of the righteous is life, the income of the wicked, punishment” (10:16).

This is very similar to what Paul later wrote to the saints in Rome: *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).* Those who are wicked will receive what they deserve for their deeds – punishment. Those who are righteous will receive what the Lord promised as the reward of obeying Him – life. The fact that Solomon uses the term *“wages”* should not be interpreted to mean that man can somehow *earn* God's favor. On the other hand, we should not interpret Paul's statement to mean that God's grace is wholly unconditional. Even Paul spoke of the necessity of obedience to God (cf. Romans 1:5; 6:17-22; 16:26). All those who are righteous, whether in the Old or New Testament, receive the rewards of God's grace, not unconditionally, but by meeting the conditions that God put in place in the law which they are under. Even today, those who are righteous are the ones who may look forward to receiving

the rewards of His grace.

“When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous has an everlasting foundation” (10:25).

The *whirlwind* is often used in Scripture to denote divine judgment (Psalm 58:9; Isaiah 29:6; 66:15; Hosea 8:7; Nahum 1:3). God will punish the wicked – not just with negative consequences in this life, but with a punishment that parallels the reward of the righteous. This reward is not temporary, but *everlasting*.

“The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened. The hope of the righteous is gladness, but the expectation of the wicked perishes. The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the upright, but ruin to the workers of iniquity. The righteous will never be shaken, but the wicked will not dwell in the land” (10:27-30).

Though Solomon has been pointing out many of the ways in which righteousness benefits us in this life, the rewards that come from fearing God and acting righteously are certainly not limited to this life. The *hope* of which he speaks includes hope *after death*. *“The wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing, but the righteous has a refuge when he dies” (14:32). “He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is careless of conduct will die” (19:16).* These verses make it clear that the rewards of righteousness pertain to one's soul (physical life) as well as his spirit (life after death) so that he may be secure (have *“a refuge”*) in death.

“The perverse in heart are an abomination to the Lord, but the blameless in their walk are His delight. Assuredly, the evil man will not go unpunished, but the descendants of the righteous will be delivered” (11:20-21).

We have already seen that those who act wickedly fall out of favor with their fellow man (cf. 12:8; 24:8-9). But worse than falling out of favor with man is, as this passage mentions, falling out of favor with the Lord. One who is *“perverse in heart”* – meaning he has rejected God's instructions – will be *punished*, whereas *“the righteous will be delivered”* because the Lord *delights* in him.

“The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand” (12:7).

This verse could easily be applied to both *physical* and *spiritual* consequences of either righteousness or wickedness. But more than the wicked facing hardship in this life (cf. 13:15), their ultimate future is that they will be *“no more.”* This is more than just physical death; otherwise, it could be said that the righteous would also be *“no more”* at some point in the future. We can make application of this to our spirits which will live on after our bodies are dead and buried. The wicked *“are no more”* in that they will no longer have any hope or enjoy any blessing from the Lord. Those who are righteous *“will stand”* in that they will enjoy God's continued blessing and eternal reward for their righteousness (cf. 14:11).

“Fools mock at sin, but among the upright there is good will” (14:9).

Sin is not just anything man might regard as being wrong. It is not defined by an individual, a culture, or a civil authority. Sin is a transgression of the law of God. Fools not only reject God's wisdom in order to walk after their own way, but they also *mock* at the very idea of sin and, by implication, their accountability before God. In contrast, the upright recognize God's instructions and the fact that He will hold them accountable. Therefore, they will follow the law of the Lord. As a result, they obtain "*good will*" or "*favour*" (KJV) from God.

"Will they not go astray who devise evil? But kindness and truth will be to those who devise good" (14:22).

Those who dwell on those things which are evil will stray from God. One cannot remain pure in word and deed while being corrupt in heart. Earlier, Solomon writes, "*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life*" (4:23). And later, "*For as he thinks within himself, so he is*" (23:7). But for "*those who devise good*" and dwell on things that are good and right (cf. Philippians 4:8), they will remain in God's favor as they continue to walk in truth.

"In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge" (14:26).

We have already noticed that "*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*" and "*wisdom*" (1:7; 9:10). As one fears God, grows in knowledge, and gains wisdom, he is able to have "*strong confidence*" – not in himself, but in God and the divine promises to those who are faithful to Him. This is not arrogance, as some who are *over confident* in themselves, but rather is the recognition that if one humbly submits to the will

of God, he will be rewarded. Furthermore, when one is faithful to God, he will not have a guilty conscience over some hidden sin. He will not be fearfully awaiting the negative consequences that come from wickedness, not knowing when his evil deeds will finally catch up with him. Solomon later writes, "*The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion*" (28:1). With firm reliance upon God and His promises and providence, the righteous are able to be confident in the face of any situation. The wicked have no such foundation. Therefore, any time there is even the threat of trouble, the wicked man has no one to trust in but himself.

* * *

After contrasting the righteous and the wicked (both in terms of *physical* and *spiritual* consequences) and considering the value and rewards of wisdom and examining the perils of wickedness, we ought to have a healthy *appreciation* for wisdom. Having this, we are prepared for the next part of our discussion – the *acquisition* of wisdom.

The Acquisition of Wisdom

Now that we have considered the *appeal* of wisdom and can now *appreciate* the reasons why we should pursue wisdom, we turn our attention to *acquiring* wisdom. Once we know we need wisdom, how do we obtain it? The book of Proverbs addresses this question for us as well.

The Proper Approach to Acquiring Wisdom

In order to gain wisdom, we must have the right foundation. This means we start in the right *place* and have the right *mindset*, right *outlook*, and right *teachers*.

The *place* in which we must start if we hope to acquire wisdom is *in the fear of the Lord*. “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*” (1:7). “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (9:10). Without fearing God, there is no reason to listen to His instruction or follow after His wisdom. There is no motivation to do anything but what *we* desire. But if we fear the Lord, we will be motivated by what *He* desires.

The *mindset* we must possess starts with having good sense. This means that one *appreciates* wisdom and is willing to do what is necessary to acquire it. This is the opposite of the fool who disregards wisdom and does not want to do what is necessary to obtain it. Solomon asks, “*Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, when he has no sense?*” (17:16). If one

has “*no sense*,” there is nothing he can give in order to gain wisdom. And even if he were able to somehow “*buy wisdom*,” he would not know what to do with it once he had it. One must “*apply [his] mind to...knowledge*” (22:17; cf. 23:12) if he expects to grow in wisdom.

The *outlook* that we must have is one that expects continued growth throughout a lifetime. Our goal in obtaining wisdom will not be fully realized in young adulthood. Is it possible for a young man to have obtained a certain degree of wisdom in various aspects of life? Certainly. But we must be of the mind that we will continue to grow in wisdom at every stage in life. “*The glory of young men is their strength, and the honor of old men is their gray hair*” (20:29). The “*gray hair*” symbolizes *wisdom* that one has gained through a lifetime of experience. “*A gray head is a crown of glory; it is found in the way of righteousness*” (16:31). While young men might glory in their strength, they must be making efforts to grow in wisdom, even in their youth, so that when old age comes, they may be wise as God wants them to be.

The *teachers* from whom we must learn if we hope to gain wisdom must be wise themselves. “*He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm*” (13:20). We cannot expect to become wise in the ways of God if we surround ourselves with those who will influence us in foolish and wicked ways. The wise man asks, “*Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of the words of truth that you may correctly answer him who sent you?*” (22:20-21). The instruction from the wise man was designed to be taken and used by the one who was taught. We must have the right teachers – those who will instruct us of God's wisdom – if we hope to obtain this

wisdom for ourselves. But what if one has no wise counselor to teach him? Is he then doomed to never being able to obtain wisdom? No, he can still obtain wisdom; but he must reject those who would direct him in foolish and wicked ways and follow the wise counsel found in the word of God.

And so, with the proper foundation, we have instructions to *acquire* wisdom.

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil” (3:1-7).

“My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them and health to all their body. Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put devious speech far from you. Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot

from evil” (4:20-27).

The passages above emphasize the fact that wisdom is obtained through instruction that is passed from one to another – in this case, from a father to a son. We often talk about how wisdom comes with experience. This is true but not with experience *alone*. Wisdom is rooted in knowledge (3:1; 4:20). Knowledge is based upon what God has revealed (3:5-6). This knowledge of God's will must be bound about one's neck (3:3) and kept in one's heart (4:21), “*for from it flow the springs of life*” (4:23). With this knowledge, one turns from evil (3:7) and obeys the instructions of God (3:1).

Our determination to acquire wisdom must be wholehearted – trusting in God “*with all [our] heart*” and acknowledging Him “*in all [our] ways*” (3:5-6). We must remain focused, with our “*eyes [looking] directly ahead*” (4:25). We must be careful in our walk, watching “*the paths of [our] feet*” (4:26). We must be upright in all things – not turning “*to the right nor to the left*” and keeping ourselves “*from evil*” (4:27).

To Acquire Wisdom, We Must Listen

As wisdom is based upon instruction, it is therefore necessary for us to *listen* to wise counsel in order to acquire wisdom. So the wise father calls upon his son to *listen* to his words.

“Hear, my son, and accept my sayings and the years of your life will be many. I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths. When you walk, your steps will not be impeded; and if you run, you will not stumble. Take hold of

instruction; do not let go. Guard her, for she is your life" (4:10-13).

Notice how the father tells his son to listen. "*Hear...and accept my sayings" (4:10). "Take hold of instruction" (4:13).* Elsewhere the wise man says, "*Listen, my son, and be wise" (23:19), and "Listen to your father who begot you" (23:22).* The goal in this listening is to *acquire* wisdom. "*Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days" (19:20).*

This listening must be more than just *hearing* what is being taught. One may listen to a parent, teacher, or someone else who is trying to impart wisdom to him; but the words go "in one ear and out the other." He does not pay attention. He does not remember. And he certainly does not observe what was taught. We need to practice *real listening* if we hope to obtain wisdom. So the father says, "*Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways" (23:26).* We have already noticed how the "*springs of life" flow from the heart (4:23).* Therefore, the instruction that we allow to be written on our hearts is the instruction that will have the greatest effect on our lives. So our listening must not be superficial and soon to be forgotten. We must absorb the wise counsel we receive into our innermost being so that wisdom can spring forth from our hearts to be manifested in our lives.

As we listen, we must also listen with a view toward *observing* what we learn. This is important because of the consequences of failing to do so – many of which we have already considered. The wise man says, "*He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray" (10:17).* The wise counsel we receive must be put into

practice if we hope to gain the rewards of wisdom.

“My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother” (6:20).

“For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life” (6:23).

This view toward observing what is taught is essential. Early in the book, Solomon writes, *“My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding... Then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God” (2:1-5)*. Listening attentively, even to the point of *treasuring* commandments (and, by implication, striving to follow them), is necessary if we want to gain knowledge and grow in wisdom.

* * *

However, we must understand that there is a *right* way and a *wrong* way to listen. Let us first consider the *right* way to listen.

“Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory” (11:14).

Similar statements are made elsewhere in the book (15:22; 20:18; 24:6). It is dangerous to have *“no guidance.”* We need to have others to counsel us in the ways of divine wisdom. But Solomon does not just talk about one or two counselors to

provide help but an “*abundance of counselors.*” It is good to seek guidance from multiple sources rather than putting complete trust in one man. After all, even our counselors may be mistaken from time to time. Therefore, it is helpful to receive instruction from several teachers. However, in doing this, we must heed the warning of Solomon: “*The naive believes everything, but the sensible man considers his steps*” (14:15). While an “*abundance of counselors*” can often be good, we must be careful not to believe everything we hear, lest we be like those of whom Paul later wrote who were “*carried about by every wind of doctrine*” (Ephesians 4:14). We must be careful that we accept godly wisdom and reject worldly wisdom (foolishness).

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (12:15).

The wise man is one “*who listens to counsel.*” He stands in contrast with the “*fool*” who is “*right in his own eyes.*” The implication is that the fool arrogantly holds onto what “*seems right*” to him (14:12; 16:25) and is, therefore, not willing to listen. “*Through insolence [pride, KJV] comes nothing but strife, but wisdom is with those who receive counsel*” (13:10). The wise man, exercising humility, is prepared to listen and grow even more in the ways of wisdom.

“A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, he will not go to the wise” (15:12).

The *scoffer* is one who does more than just disregard or ignore wise counsel. He *scoffs* at it or *mocks* it. He has no respect for the message or the one trying to present it. “*He will not go to the wise*”; and he will, therefore, not become wise (13:20). But if we listen with respect, both for the message and

those who are faithfully presenting it, we can gain wisdom.

*“He who gives attention to the word will find good,
and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord” (16:20).*

If we hope to *acquire* wisdom, we must also listen *in faith* (trusting in the Lord). Our faith is not in the wise counselors who might teach us. As we have already discussed, these individuals may, at times, be wrong. Therefore, we must be careful to what we listen (14:15). But our faith and trust must always be in the Lord. We must listen *in faith*, knowing that what He instructs is right and for our good.

* * *

As there is a *right* way to listen, there is also a *wrong* way to listen. Let us notice a few passages that speak of this.

*“The wise of heart will receive commands, but a
babbling fool will be ruined” (10:8).*

We have already noticed that the wise are willing to *listen*. The fool, however, is not interested in *listening* but in *talking*. Solomon later writes, *“A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind” (18:2)*. Therefore, as a result of his unwillingness to listen, preferring to speak before he has understanding, he *“will be ruined.”*

*“Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has
understanding, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends
of the earth” (17:24).*

Again we see that understanding – which comes as the

result of *listening* – leads to wisdom. Sometimes the fool is unwilling to listen because he is only interested in speaking (10:8; 18:2). Other times he may listen, but he does not listen well because he is distracted. His “*eyes...are on the ends of the earth,*” and he will not focus on the instruction that can lead to wisdom.

“Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words” (23:9).

In this verse, Solomon addresses those who teach, warning them of the futility of trying to teach one who is a fool. The fool will not listen because he *despises wisdom*. Therefore, any teaching he may hear as the result of one trying to instruct him will be rejected.

“How blessed is the man who fears always, but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity” (28:14).

The hard heart belongs to the person who refuses to listen because he does not believe he needs to listen. He is stuck in his ways, refusing to change or even acknowledge that a change might, at times, be necessary. He trusts in himself and does not see the need to fear God and follow Him. Solomon warns that one who “*hardens his heart*” will suffer hardship for it and will miss out on the blessings that come from humbly listening to wise counsel.

To Acquire Wisdom, We Must Learn

Another step in *acquiring* wisdom is that we must *learn*. The knowledge that leads to understanding is available, both

through the written word of God and the wise counsel that we receive from others. But the mere fact that knowledge is available does not mean we will automatically obtain it. We must *learn* it for ourselves.

If we are to *learn*, we must *seek to learn*. That is, we must have a desire to learn.

“The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly” (15:14).

One who is *intelligent*, who will attain to wisdom, will not wait for knowledge to come to him. He will *seek knowledge*. We often talk about wisdom coming through experience. This is true, but it does not come by experience *alone*. We must seek after knowledge that has been revealed from God and not be like the fool who is content with *folly*.

“The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (18:15).

We have already discussed the importance of *listening*. This is certainly found in this verse as well. But more than just listening, this verse emphasizes the need to *seek after* wise counsel rather than waiting to stumble upon it. The mind will acquire knowledge, leading to wisdom, but only after the ear *seeks knowledge*.

“The righteous one considers the house of the wicked, turning the wicked to ruin” (21:12).

The one who is righteous (and wise) will consider the house of the wicked. He will see the trouble and hardship that

comes as a consequence of wickedness. He will observe the “ruin” of the wicked. The King James Version emphasizes the fact that the wicked will be judged by God for their evil: *“God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.”* One who is wise will learn, not just by listening to or studying from the word of God and those who teach it, but by observing the way of the wicked. We must learn from the mistakes of others because we will never be able to make them all ourselves.

* * *

Having the desire to learn is essential. But some may wonder if they will actually be able to obtain wisdom or if the pursuit of wisdom will be an exercise of futility. While the pursuit of *worldly* wisdom is futile (Ecclesiastes 1:17-18; 2:12-17), we are assured that we *will* be able to learn and gain *divine* wisdom.

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul” (2:6-10).

The wisdom that we are considering is the wisdom that comes from above. Because it is from Almighty God, it is able to be distributed according to His will without hindrance. James later wrote, *“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" (James 1:5). This prayer that James mentioned is not answered miraculously as it was with Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-12). Instead, it is answered as we follow the divinely prescribed way of obtaining wisdom, as the book of Proverbs discusses – through learning and practice of God's word. When we follow God's way of obtaining wisdom, we can be assured that we *will* grow in knowledge and acquire wisdom. Solomon says, *"You will discern,"* and, *"Wisdom will enter your heart."* Wisdom says, *"I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me"* (8:17).

"Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning" (9:9).

When one begins growing in wisdom and understanding, as long as he continues on with the same mentality and desire to grow, he *"will increase his learning"* and *"be still wiser."* Growing in wisdom is a process that continues throughout one's lifetime.

"The naive inherit foolishness, but the sensible are crowned with knowledge" (14:18).

There are two groups of people who lack understanding: those who desire to gain understanding (described in this verse as *"sensible"*) and those who have no interest in understanding (those who are willfully *"naive"*). Those who remain without knowledge will *"inherit foolishness"* and receive the consequences that come with that. But those who are *"sensible"* and apply themselves to understanding the will of God *will* be *"crowned with knowledge."*

“Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding, but in the heart of fools it is made known” (14:33).

Once we have understanding, which we are told we *will* obtain when we pursue it according to the Lord's will, we *will* acquire wisdom as well. Once we acquire it, wisdom will rest in our hearts where it will be manifested in our daily lives. In the same way, the fool's lack of wisdom will also be manifested. In the second part of this verse, the King James Version says, *“That which is in the midst of fools is made known.”*

* * *

However, though there is a promise that we *will* learn if we seek to learn, the book of Proverbs also teaches us that there are some who *will not learn*. Let us notice the reasons for this.

“Wise men store up knowledge, but with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand” (10:14).

Again, those who act wisely *will* gain knowledge. However, if someone will not quit talking and *“revealing his own mind”* (18:2) long enough to *listen*, he will not *learn* (cf. 10:8).

“A scoffer seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge is easy to one who has understanding” (14:6).

This verse talks about one who *“seeks wisdom”* but *“finds none.”* Though we have already noticed how the *desire to learn* is essential (15:14; 18:15), the desire alone is not enough. One

may claim to desire wisdom, and will therefore seek after it; but if he is a “scoffer,” he will have no regard for the instruction that would lead him to acquire wisdom. Therefore, though he seeks for it in some sense, he will not obtain wisdom.

“The wisdom of the sensible is to understand his way, but the foolishness of fools is deceit” (14:8).

Foolishness deceives one into thinking that he is actually wise. Foolishness is presented as wisdom and is regarded as such by many in the world. Yet Paul said, “*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God*” (1 Corinthians 3:19). In this state of delusion in which one believes that what is *foolish* is actually *wise*, he will not listen to or learn something that is contrary to the “wisdom” that he already knows.

“Like legs which are useless to the lame, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools” (26:7).

“Like a thorn which falls into the hand of a drunkard, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools” (26:9).

The proverb delivered by the wise counselor is able to help the one who has understanding. However, the fool, though he may know the proverb even to the point of being able to repeat it, will not get any benefit from it. It is not that he does not *know* it (it is in his mouth; he is able to speak it); it is that he does not *understand* it and cannot *apply* it properly. To him, the proverb is as legs to a lame man. Though he has them, he cannot use them properly, if at all. As he seeks wisdom, which is pleasant like a rose, he comes away without the rose, but

with only the thorn stuck in his hand. Because he lacks understanding, he will not acquire wisdom; and the vain pursuit of it will only bring harm to himself.

To Acquire Wisdom, We Must Be Humble

Humility is necessary in order to *acquire* wisdom. “*When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom*” (11:2). As wisdom comes from instruction and understanding, we must be humble enough to admit our own lack of wisdom and the need to pursue it. Without humility, we will not believe we need wisdom and will, therefore, ignore it.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil” (3:5-7).

When we possess *humility*, we will understand that there are answers we do not have and guidance that we need. Therefore, we will not “*lean on [our] own understanding*” or “*be wise in [our] own eyes.*” We will seek guidance and be open to instruction. However, it is important that we get the right guidance. So Solomon says we must put our trust *in the Lord*. Many today put their trust in parents, professors, or preachers to lead them in the paths of wisdom. While we may certainly be helped by the instruction of others (11:14; 15:22; 24:6), it is only when such instruction is in harmony with the wisdom that comes from above that it will do us any good. Therefore, our trust is not in others who might teach us but in the Lord.

“The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility” (15:33).

Elsewhere Solomon writes, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10)*. The second part of this verse tells us that *humility* is a precursor for *honor*. Earlier, the wise man says, *“The wise will inherit honor” (3:35)*. Honor is one of the rewards of wisdom. The fact that humility comes before honor tells us that humility is necessary in order to acquire wisdom.

“He who conceals his transgression will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion” (28:13).

Confession of wrongdoing is an act of humility. In order to confess, one must be humble enough to acknowledge his sin and admit it to others. One who tries to hide his sin demonstrates a lack of humility that will keep him in his sin and on the path of wickedness. One with the humility to *confess* and *forsake* his sin will find himself on the path that leads to wisdom.

“Surely I am more stupid than any man, and I do not have the understanding of a man. Neither have I learned wisdom, nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know! Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him” (30:2-5).

This is the beginning of “*the words of Agur*” (30:1). He starts with a bit of hyperbole, saying he is “*more stupid than any man.*” His point is that he is *humble* and not trusting in himself for wisdom or understanding. He then acknowledges the greatness of God in creating and sustaining the earth. Because there is no one greater than God, he puts his trust in Him and His word. Even though he is “*more stupid than any man,*” he is not going to be content in putting his trust in another man who is wiser and more knowledgeable than he is. Only God’s words are tested and are able to protect us from the perils of wickedness. Therefore, we must “*take refuge in Him.*”

* * *

As *humility* leads to wisdom and honor, *pride* leads to destruction.

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud” (16:18-19).

Pride leads to one’s downfall. Elsewhere, Solomon adds to this thought: “*But humility goes before honor*” (18:12; cf. 29:23). This is why he says, “*It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly.*” In the long term, it is better to be humble in order to later be exalted (cf. 1 Peter 5:5-6). However, most people tend to be shortsighted and look at the immediate “*spoil*” that is associated with “*the proud.*” So they arrogantly follow the path of instant gratification. Yet in the end, as they have rejected divine wisdom, they will stumble and ultimately be destroyed.

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (14:12).

The one who is puffed up with pride trusts in his own way. He rejects instruction because he does not believe that he needs it. He is unwilling to change his thinking or his direction. Jeremiah said, *“I know, O Lord, that a man’s way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps”* (Jeremiah 10:23). This is true for all men of all time. Without learning of God and His ways, we cannot find the way of life. When we reject the wisdom that comes from above, no matter what other direction we take, we will be on a path that leads to *death* (cf. 16:25).

“Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (26:12).

The one who is *“wise in his own eyes”* is the one who has rejected divine wisdom for the *“way which seems right”* to him (14:12; 16:25). He is contrasted with the *fool* in this passage. Therefore, we must understand the *“fool”* of this verse to be one who simply *lacks* wisdom, not one who has *rejected* wisdom. Because he only *lacks* wisdom, there is *hope* for him that if he can receive the right instruction, he can acquire wisdom. However, for one who is *“wise in his own eyes,”* in his arrogance he sees no need to listen, learn, or acquire godly wisdom, even though his deficiency of wisdom will be apparent to others. Solomon offers two examples to illustrate this point. *“The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can give a discreet answer”* (26:16). Though the impoverished and miserable condition of the sluggard is apparent to those who know him, in his arrogance he cannot see the need to change anything about his life. *“The rich man is*

wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding sees through him" (28:11). The rich man of this verse is not a righteous man who happens to be blessed with riches. He is a rich man who puts his trust in riches. This rich man may believe that he is fully self-sufficient and that his prosperity is a sign that he has more than enough wisdom on his own and needs no wisdom from God. Yet the poor man who has understanding (divine wisdom) will be able to see the folly of the rich man's arrogance.

"There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, yet is not washed from his filthiness. There is a kind—oh how lofty are his eyes! And his eyelids are raised in arrogance" (30:12-13).

Arrogance causes the filthy man (one who is mired in sin) to believe he is pure. The New American Standard version uses the term *kind* with the singular *his*, suggesting an individual. The King James Version uses the term *generation* and *their*, which would indicate a larger group. In either case, the point is about those who will not listen to others who could provide them with wise counsel, whether it is the younger generation refusing to listen to the older generation, or an individual refusing to listen to others who could instruct him. Those who are arrogant will not listen to rebuke and will remain in their sin.

To Acquire Wisdom, We Must Be Disciplined

A willingness to listen, desire to learn, and spirit of humility are essential for one to be able to *acquire* wisdom. But there is one more component that is necessary – *discipline*. The instruction which we *listen to, learn,* and receive in *humility* will

get us on the path of wisdom. *Discipline* keeps us on the right path once we are on it. If we ever stray from the path, *discipline* is what gets us back on track. So the wise man says, “*Apply your heart to discipline and your ears to words of knowledge*” (23:12).

“My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights” (3:11-12).

Discipline is not pleasant when it is being administered. The discipline of the Lord often comes to us today in the form of rebuke and correction from His word and the negative consequences that come as a result of our disobedience. We are not to *reject* or *loathe* it. The reason why the Lord disciplines us is not because He *hates* us, but because He *loves* us and wants to guide us to the way that is right. The Hebrew writer explained this passage when he discussed the suffering those brethren were experiencing at the hands of wicked men (Hebrews 12:5-10). We are disciplined because we have a loving Father in heaven who is committed to raising us properly. The Hebrew writer added: “*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*” (Hebrews 12:11). Ultimately, this discipline is for our good, even though it may not seem to be from a short-sighted perspective. This is why Solomon says elsewhere, “*A wise son accepts his father’s discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke*” (13:1).

“He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding” (15:32).

We have just noticed that discipline is not pleasant but is necessary and, ultimately, for our good (Hebrews 12:11). The reason why it is good for us is that through discipline we gain understanding which leads to wisdom. One who tries to avoid discipline may do so in an effort to preserve himself; but if we look into the future, *discipline* leads us to the blessings of wisdom. One who rejects discipline is not helping himself but is harming himself, thereby showing that he *“despises himself.”*

“A slave will not be instructed by words alone; for though he understands, there will be no response” (29:19).

The slave was one who was obligated to obey his master's instructions in all things. In this way, it is an appropriate comparison to our responsibility to obey the Lord. There must be more than just *teaching* (*“words alone”*); otherwise, what is there to motivate the slave to obey? Even if the slave hears the instructions and understands them, there is no reason to obey the instructions without the threat of real consequences for disobedience – *discipline*. Discipline is necessary to motivate one who knows what is right to actually do it.

* * *

Though discipline is necessary for one to learn, many do not see the point of trying to learn. The book of Proverbs contains a few passages that deal with the *benefit* of discipline and the end result of it.

“Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days” (19:20).

The New American Standard translates the second part of this verse, *“that you may be wise the rest of your days.”* The King James Version is slightly different: *“That thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.”* The former emphasizes a progression of gaining wisdom while the latter emphasizes the goal of possessing wisdom in the end. In either case, discipline is about our *future*, rather than the present. In the future, the discipline that leads us to grow in knowledge from God will result in wisdom, understanding (12:1), and honor (13:18).

“For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life” (6:23).

In the previous verses, we saw that *discipline* leads to wisdom (19:20), understanding (12:1), and honor (13:18). If these were not enough to convince one of the benefits of discipline, the wise man adds here that the path of discipline is *“the way of life.”* It will help us avoid trouble in this life (6:24-35), as well as in the next (7:22-27).

“A fool rejects his father’s discipline, but he who regards reproof is sensible” (15:5).

Knowing the benefits of discipline, it is a fool who rejects it. One who is *sensible* will accept discipline because he knows that it is ultimately for his good.

“Stripes that wound scour away evil, and strokes reach the innermost parts” (20:30).

This verse mentions the unpleasant nature of discipline. Though we might be able to immediately see the point of this verse as it relates to the discipline and training of children, the principle applies to every type of discipline. Discipline is not just about punishing wrongdoing. It is also not just about suffering consequences as a fact of life. There is another purpose to discipline – *scouring away evil*. Discipline that is properly administered (and is also properly regarded by the one being disciplined) will help him to remove sin from his life, not just outwardly, but from his heart.

* * *

Unfortunately, not all are willing to accept discipline as being for their good. Some will reject it. This has consequences.

“Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; he who hates reproof will die” (15:10).

The way that is being forsaken is the way of *wisdom*. Those who reject God's standard and do not walk according to it will be punished. The goal of discipline (“*reproof*”) is correction so that the one who once rejected God's ways will return to them. One who “*hates reproof*” will continue on the path that leads away from life and, without an appropriate change of direction, will eventually face *death* – not physical death (which we must all face) but eternal separation from God.

“Cease listening, my son, to discipline, and you will stray from the words of knowledge” (19:27).

The wise man is, of course, not trying to persuade his son

to stop listening to discipline. He is simply explaining the consequences of ceasing to listen. He “*will stray*” – indicating not a *possibility*, but a *certainty* – from true knowledge and wisdom, following instead the path that leads to punishment and death (15:10).

“A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools” (26:3).

The whip and the bridle were necessary for these animals because they could not understand and decide to take the right path on their own with nothing more than verbal instructions from their owner. Therefore, the whip and the bridle were necessary in order to persuade them to do what was expected of them. The longer it took for them to listen and respond appropriately, the more pain and discomfort the animal would feel. In the same way, “*a rod [is] for the back of fools,*” in that one who rejects discipline and refuses to follow wisdom will continue to suffer the consequences of his disobedience.

“A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy” (29:1).

The hardening of the neck refers to one's heart becoming calloused. Though he may be *disciplined* in order to be corrected, his conscience has become seared (cf. 1 Timothy 4:2) so that he will not abandon his sin. Eventually, after rejecting discipline for so long, he will be broken *suddenly* (cf. 6:15), meaning his sin will catch up with him and he will reach the point of no return. This is when his *calamity* (6:15) comes. There will come a point in the future when everyone who rejects discipline and continues in the path of wickedness will

no longer have any hope of correction and avoiding the ultimate fate for their folly.

* * *

The passages we have noticed so far on the topic of *discipline* have had to do with *receiving* discipline. But what if we are the ones needing to exercise discipline and reprove others? The book of Proverbs contains instructions that teach us how we are to administer discipline and warns us of how it will often be received.

“He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, reprove a wise man and he will love you” (9:7-8).

The dishonor one receives when he corrects a scoffer is from the scoffer himself. He is not interested in learning the way of wisdom. He simply wants to do what seems right to him. Therefore, if one tries to correct him, *“he will hate you.”* Elsewhere it says, *“A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, he will not go to the wise” (15:12).* Rather than responding with gratitude, as the wise man will, the scoffer will respond with *insults* directed toward the one attempting to correct him. One must have a thick skin if he is going to correct others, or else he will soon abandon his attempts.

“Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, but the discipline of fools is folly” (16:22).

“A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool” (17:10).

“Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his foolishness will not depart from him” (27:22).

The first verse listed above describes the discipline of fools as being a futile endeavor. The reason for this is because the fool is not willing to listen. He is not interested in the truth. Therefore, any effort to teach him will be in vain. One with understanding has it because he has desired it and has worked to obtain it. Therefore, because of his good attitude, any rebuke that is necessary “*goes deeper*” into him and helps him to grow. In contrast, a fool has no desire to gain understanding. Therefore, the discipline that would help the wise man, though it may be administered a hundred times to the fool, will not cause any change in him. Though he may be crushed, “*yet his foolishness will not depart from him.*”

“Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd, but reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge” (19:25).

From the earlier passages, it may seem as though the discipline of fools is pointless. If they will not listen and correct their ways, why bother trying to correct them at all? The answer is found in this verse. When a person “*strike[s] a scoffer,*” though one may be dishonored, insulted, and hated (9:7-8), others may be helped by one’s efforts. Though the scoffer may not change, “*the naive*” who witness your efforts may learn the lesson that was intended for the one receiving the discipline. As a result, he may become *shrewd* or *wise* (cf. 21:11).

“He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue” (28:23).

This is another passage that reminds us that it is better to try to correct someone than not, even if we risk the insults and hatred that sometimes come from one who rejects discipline. Flattering the one who needs to change does nothing to help them. Rebuking him may result in insults and hatred (9:7-8). Or it could lead him to “love you” (9:8) as he learns the way of wisdom. “Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed” (27:5). Better to rebuke someone on the chance that he will repent than to flatter him and thus provide implicit encouragement for him to remain in his sin.

The Application of Wisdom

It is absolutely essential that we recognize the *appeal* of wisdom. Once we know that Wisdom is calling to us, we must learn to *appreciate* wisdom so that we have a reason to pay attention to her appeals. Understanding this, we then need to work toward *acquiring* wisdom. But all of this is futile if, after we do all to *acquire* it, we do not *apply* wisdom.

The bulk of the book of Proverbs, and the majority of our study, focuses on the *application* of wisdom. When God reveals His wisdom, man is not to pursue it merely out of intellectual curiosity. God expects us to put what we learn into practice.

“Every prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool displays folly” (13:16).

A “*prudent man*” does not merely *possess* knowledge, though he certainly does possess it. He will do more than just *acquire* knowledge. He will *act with knowledge*. The things that he learns will be put on display in his life, just as folly is on display in the life of the fool.

“Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, and so is wisdom to a man of understanding” (10:23).

The fool is said to *enjoy* practicing wickedness. It is like a sport to him. A contrast is made between the fool and the man of understanding. The fool enjoys “*doing wickedness.*” Though

“doing” is not explicitly stated in regard to wisdom, the contrast implies it. Just as the fool enjoys *“doing wickedness,”* the man of understanding enjoys *doing* that which is wise.

“A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out” (20:5).

Water that is at the bottom of a deep well has the *potential* to do good, but only when one does what is necessary to draw it out is it actually helpful to him. In the same way, having plans and intentions to do good and act with wisdom only have the *potential* of doing good. One who has learned the truth has the capacity to act with wisdom. But he must draw it out of his heart (mind) so that it is manifested in his actions. Only then will wisdom actually benefit the one who possesses it.

“Like a dog returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly” (26:11).

One who will repeatedly go back to his sin and walk in foolishness is like the dog with its ignorant and disgusting behavior. There is no benefit for returning to one's foolish ways. If one had sense, he would be repulsed by the thought of returning to his folly. But the fool, like the dog who returns to its vomit, keeps going back to his sin. The instructions given in the book of Proverbs are not just for us to learn what is expected of us. They are written so that we might forsake our sin and follow after righteousness.

So as we seek to *apply* wisdom, there are several topics which we will discuss as we move through our study:

- Character – some of the more general character traits we are to have, such as self-control, integrity, uprightness, and trustworthiness;
- Speech – how we can do good and keep from doing evil with our words;
- Work – proper work ethic, rewards of labor, and consequences of laziness;
- Stewardship – making good use of our money and possessions;
- Justice – being fair in our dealings and the importance of justice in a society;
- Suffering – the reality of suffering and how to deal with it;
- Alcohol – warnings against the consumption of alcohol;
- Plans for the future – the uncertainty of life and our need to trust in God;
- Women – the value of a good wife, the burden of a contentious wife, and warnings against the adulteress;
- Family – responsibilities of parents to their children (including discipline), children to their parents, and grandparents to their grandchildren;
- Friendship – the value of good friends and warnings about evil companions;
- Neighbors – how we should treat others.
- Government – the duty of civil authorities and instructions to the citizens;
- God – His mighty works and wise revelations, as well as man's accountability to Him.

We will not cover every topic or cite every verse in the book of Proverbs in our study. But we will examine the

majority of both as we discuss the topics in the list above. So I invite you to follow along with the remainder of this study as we learn more about the *application* of wisdom.

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