

Proverbs 1:8-31 Wisdom's Appeal

Sunday, January 31, 2010

Before we jump into today's text, I want to remind you of the overall structure of the book of Proverbs. There are seven distinct collections, each with its own proper heading.

- I. Proverbs of Solomon I (1:1-9:18)
- II. Proverbs of Solomon II (10:1-22:16)
- III. Thirty sayings of the wise (22:17-24:22)
- IV. Further sayings of the wise (24:23-34)
- V. Proverbs of Solomon III (25:1-29:27)

- VI. The words of Agur son of Jakeh (30:1-33)
- VII. The words of King Lemuel (31:1-31)

Collections I—V were written (for the most part) by Solomon. The sayings of the wise in sections III and IV (22:17-24:34) probably originated with the wise men whom Solomon employed in his court, some of whom, like himself must have (at least at times) possessed the spirit of prophecy.

Sections VI and VII were apparently written by foreign kings, since we have no record of any of the kings of Israel or Judah bearing these names. It seems best, therefore, to regard them as foreign kings who converted to the Jewish faith. Remember that we are told in First Kings that "people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon,

and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom" (1 Ki. 4:34). It is not unreasonable to suppose that some of these came to believe in Solomon's God, and after believing, came to compose some proverbial sayings that came to be included with Solomon's writings.

The first section (chaps 1-9) forms a prologue or introduction to the book as a whole. In contrast to the pithy aphorisms that appear in most of the rest of the book, this section is composed chiefly of poems in praise of wisdom. These odes to wisdom are in the form of a father's admonition to his son.

We may outline the section like this:

- I. **Proverbs of Solomon I** (chapters 1-9)
 - A. Preface (1:1-7)
 - B. Exhortation to heed the instruction of parents (1:8-9)
 - C. Refuse the enticement of sinners for unjust gain (1:10-19)
 - D. The call of wisdom (1:20-33)
 - E. The pursuit and rewards of wisdom (2:1-4:27)
 - 1. Wisdom is sure to be found by those who seek it (2:1-8)
 - 2. Wisdom enables one to understand righteousness (2:9-10)
 - 3. Wisdom is a defense against evil men (2:11-15)
 - 4. Wisdom is a defense against evil women (2:16-19)
 - 5. The upright will endure, but the wicked will be cut off (2:20-22)
 - 6. The essence of wisdom is to trust in the Lord (3:1-12)
 - 7. The Blessings of wisdom (3:13-26)
 - 8. Miscellaneous instruction (3:27-35)
 - 9. Solomon recounts his father's instruction (4:1-9)
 - 10. Another exhortation to heed the instruction of parents (4:10-27)
 - F. Avoid the forbidden woman: In the end she is bitter as wormwood (5:1-23)
 - G. Avoid assuming responsibility for other people's debts (6:1-5)
 - H. Laziness leads to lack (6:6-11)
 - I. The deceptive ways of a wicked man (6:12-15)
 - J. Six things the Lord hates (6:16-19)

- K. Avoid the forbidden woman II: her husband's jealousy will exact revenge (6:20-35)
- L. Avoid the forbidden woman III: her wiles lead only to death (7:1-27)
- M. Wisdom commends herself (8:1-36)
- N. Wisdom's banquet (9:1-12)
- O. Folly's banquet (9:13-18)

Last week we ended with a much too brief consideration of 1:7.

^{1:7} The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

I sought to make the point, though I was too limited by time to make it as fully as I wished, that the fear of the Lord is foundational to the whole enterprise of knowledge. It is the prerequisite to all true learning. This is so not only with respect to the knowledge of God, as might be expected, but with *all* knowledge, in whatever field, because whether we are aware of it or not, we evaluate things from some ultimate starting point—some ultimate *reference* point. And it *matters* what that reference point that is.

We judge things to be true or false, believable or unbelievable, good or bad, beautiful or ugly, worthy or unworthy, valuable or worthless, depending upon *where we begin our thinking*. What is ultimate? Where do we begin? Do we begin our thinking about any given topic with the presupposition of the existence of God and the truth of his word, so that we seek to understand things in his terms, with his definitions, from his perspective? Or do we approach things as if we are competent of ourselves to know things as we ought to know them? Do we approach the whole endeavor of the pursuit of knowledge as if we

can pursue it independently, autonomously, on our own, trusting in our own reason and our own experience to guide us into all truth? Do we live with the meaning that God imputes to things—we should after all, since he's the one who made everything? Or do we think we are free to impute whatever meaning we like to things? In other words, do we look at God's way of explaining things and say, "Well, that's *one* way to look at it"? Or do we say, "That's the only legitimate way to look at it"?

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

What does this tell you about our educational system? Up front, right out of the gate, they say not merely that these things don't matter, but that by law you are not even allowed to bring them up for discussion. We must keep God and his law separate from the educational process. The fear of the Lord is not only not regarded as the *beginning* of knowledge, it is not even regarded as having anything whatsoever to do with knowledge. We are raising functional atheists. All day long they are taught to think about mathematics, history, science, social studies, literature, geography, and current events without ever having God and his law as a part of the thinking process. I do not say, "at the center of the process," where he belongs. He's not a part of the process at all...and not allowed to be.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

What does this tell you about the news-media? You have a bunch of talking heads every night on the news who are telling you what the most important things are for you to know. They're selecting the material to fill the hour or half-hour or 23 minutes. There must be some criteria they use to make the selection. The world is a pretty big place. There are a lot of things going on. Some things are going to be thought newsworthy and are going to be included. Other things are not. By what standard do they make the evaluation? They are shaping the way you think simply by selecting what they deem to be newsworthy items. And they tell you not only *what* you are supposed to think about, but *how* you are supposed to think about them—what judgments you are to make, whether certain things are to be thought good or bad. Do they *ever* do this by referencing God's law?

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

What does this tell you about the various levels of civil government, where again, it is deemed by our current legal tradition, necessary to exclude explicit references to God and his law? If a lawyer, judge or jury refers to a biblical injunction about crime and punishment, and bases an opinion upon it, it is ruled unconstitutional and will be thrown out. The same thing is true in the legislative process. If a state legislator or a member of Congress proposes a piece of legislation based on Scripture—of course anymore not even this is necessary for it to be rejected, just let it be known that he is a Christian. He doesn't have to cite chapter and verse. He doesn't have to mention God and

his law, just let it be known that he is a Christian, and whatever he says is already suspect.

We are sowing folly and we are reaping death.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”

To fear the Lord means that we have a supreme regard for God and his law. We take *his* definitions, *his* evaluation of things, and we make them our own. At the outset, at the very beginning of our pursuit of knowledge, we acknowledge the Lord and submit our way to him. Only when we have done this are prepared to learn.

Read and comment on 1:8-33