

Proverbs 3:1-12

Trust in the Lord, the Highest Wisdom

Sunday, February 14, 2010

- ¹ My son, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commandments,
² for length of days and years of life
and peace they will add to you

The book of Proverbs is given to us in the form of a father instructing his son in the ways of wisdom. In the first nine chapters, before we ever get to what we commonly think of as proverbs proper, we have a lengthy prologue, an introduction, singing the praises of wisdom, showing its benefits and value. In this prologue we find a father *pleading* with his son to embrace a life of wisdom:

- Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching (1:8)
- My son...receive my words and treasure up my commandments (2:1)
- My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments (3:1)
- My son, be attentive to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding (5:1)

Men, we ought to learn from this. The instruction which Solomon gives his son is very *personal* and very *passionate*. It ought to be the same

for us with our children. The education of our children in the ways of God—*this* is our chief responsibility as Christian men. We can never overestimate the importance of it. It ought to be for us a holy *preoccupation*. Remember what Moses said:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut. 6:4-9).

We find the same sort of thing in **Psalm 78:1-8**.

Now, I should point out that it's never a matter of whether or not we are teaching our children, but always a matter of *what* we are teaching them. Even the father who is absent, and I mean *literally* absent—the father who skips out, jumps ship, abandons his children—is *also* teaching his children. And he's teaching his lesson very effectively, too. The lesson is that it's okay to abandon your responsibility, that providing for and protecting and loving your children is an option you can choose or not, whatever you like. It's the wrong lesson, but it's the lesson he's teaching them. Do you see? You cannot *not* teach your children. The question is: *what* are you teaching them? What are they learning by your example? What are they learning by what you do, and what you *don't* do? By what you say, and what you *don't* say?

Now, here is both a wonderful and scary thing. God has made the minds of children, *little* children especially, to *want* to learn. This is one of the things that is so endearing about little children, isn't it—their wide-eyed wonder at the world. Things that for us are old and mundane, things that we take for granted because we've seen them a thousand times, are brand new for them. And their minds are like sponges, with an incredible capacity to soak up knowledge. This is both wonderful and scary. Wonderful, because it's an incredible opportunity for us to lay a foundation in them to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Scary, because it's also an opportunity for them to learn ways of thinking and habits of life that will in the end ruin their soul.

God made our children to *want* to know. Not only so, but he gave them an implicit trust in what their parents tell them... (Give examples)

This trust is to be cultivated.

Notice what he says in verse two: "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.*" Here we see that the Bible affirms the goodness of life in this world. It sounds very spiritual to say, "This world is not my home. I'm just waiting for the sweet bye-and-bye. I can't wait to get outta here!" But this is *not* the perspective of the Bible. Now, if you're suffering the ravages of old age, or like

Paul suffering persecution, or if you're afflicted with a painful terminal illness, there might be some merit to the idea. But in general, the Bible is strongly *pro* life-in-this-world. The Christian faith is not a world-denying religion. God made the world and pronounced it good. Check that, he pronounced it *very* good! And living according to wisdom will add length of days and years of life and peace. A long life without peace isn't that great of a blessing. But wisdom adds length of days and years of life and *peace*, meaning a *good* life, a pleasant life, a blessed life.

- ³ Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.
- ⁴ So you will find favor and good success [*repute; name*]
in the sight of God and man.

You will have a good reputation—a good name—if you embrace a life of wisdom and virtue. You will have a good reputation in the sight of both God and men. A good name is a good thing. To *rightfully* be thought highly of—in other words to be thought highly of for the right reasons—is a great blessing. It is something to be sought after and highly valued.

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
and favor is better than silver or gold (22:1)

A good name is to be cultivated and guarded. This is one of the reasons for the ninth commandment, which prohibits bearing false

witness. When we bear false witness against someone, we injure their good name. Their reputation suffers.

A very wealthy businessman, who was also a very humble and sincere Christian, once said to me, "A man can lose everything, but if he has a good name he can start over and rebuild. But if he doesn't have a good name, it's going to be impossible."

Bind these Christian virtues of steadfast love and faithfulness around your neck and write them on your heart, and you will be enjoy the favor of both God and men.

Now we find what in my mind ought to be considered the very *essence* of wisdom:

- 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
6 In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

In other words, your steps will be directed by the Lord, so that instead of treading winding paths that take you far a field from where you wish to go, the Lord will make your paths straight. You will achieve the highest goals of life. You will enjoy success, blessing, prosperity, and peace. How? By trusting in the Lord with all your heart.

Now some people say this rather glibly, that they're trusting in the Lord, and they don't have the foggiest notion what it means to trust in the Lord *according to the Bible*.

So what does it mean to trust the Lord? Well, I'll tell you what it *doesn't* mean. It doesn't mean that you just sit back and do nothing and leave everything up to God.

Let's say, for instance, that you are in need of employment. Trusting the Lord doesn't mean that you just sit at home by the telephone waiting for someone to call with the job offer of your dreams. Someone says, "Shouldn't you be out looking for a job?" And you say, "No, no, I'm trusting the Lord to provide me with a job." And you never go out and apply anywhere. You never call anyone. You never send a resume to anyone. You never search the help wanted ads in the newspaper or go to the head-hunter websites online. You just sit at home by the phone, waiting for someone to call and offer you a job with a six figure salary. That's not trusting the Lord. Trusting the Lord means that you have confidence he will bless the means he has appointed for you to accomplish something. So that means you undertake to make yourself more marketable. You go out and beat the bushes. You call prospective employers. You stop by and visit them. You let them know that you're serious about wanting a job. You do whatever is in *your* power to find a job, and you trust the Lord to bless it.

This would be like a farmer who doesn't go out and plow the ground or plant any seed, and yet he hopes to harvest a crop. And someone says, "Don't you think you ought to get out in the field and work?" And he says, "No, I'm trusting the Lord for a crop."

Trusting the Lord is never an excuse for idleness. Trusting the Lord means that you have confidence that he will bless his appointed means for accomplishing things. You trust that the Lord will bless your labor and make it fruitful. You trust him for the growth of the crops; to send rain at the proper time; etc. It means that when you are actively looking for a job that he will direct you to one that you are well suited for and will meet your needs. It means that when you are looking for a spouse that he will guide you to one who is appropriate for you.

Now, as I have mentioned before, one of the features of Hebrew poetry is what is called parallelism. Do you remember when we discussed that, early on in our study of Proverbs? Hebrew poetry is often arranged in couplets, two lines that are thematically joined together in such a way that the second line expands in some way upon the first. It may *restate* the idea of the first line in different words. It may *build upon* the idea of the first line. Or it may state the *antithesis* of the first line.

Notice how this works in verse five.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.

Do you see how the second line states the antithesis of the first?
Leaning on your own understanding is the antithesis of trusting in the Lord. Or to say it another way, it's the opposite of trusting in the Lord. Trusting in the Lord and leaning on your own understanding are two contrary and opposing principles.

Example of Eve...

3:7-12