

Proverbs 4 Get Wisdom, Get Insight

Sunday, February 28, 2010

The chapter can be divided into two sections. First, verses 1-9, in which Solomon recounts for his sons the instruction he had received from his father; and second, verses 10-27, in which we find an exhortation to avoid association with the wicked.

In verses 1-9 Solomon recounts for his sons the instruction he had received from his father.

He begins by pleading with them to pay heed to his teaching.

- ¹ Hear, O sons, a father's instruction,
and be attentive, that you may gain insight,
- ² for I give you good precepts;
do not forsake my teaching.

Now, see how he *pleads* with his children. "Listen, my sons, to what I have to say. The precepts I give you are *good*." He means both that they are *morally* good, that is, they are upright and pleasing to the Lord; and that they are good in the sense that keeping them works for their benefit. Keeping them leads to a happy life.

Now, I wish I had the power somehow to drive this home, to establish it, embed it, in people's minds—somehow to make this the automatic presupposition of all thought—that the

commandments of the Lord, the law of God, is good and wise. I wish somehow that I had the power to inscribe this on people's hearts, so that we come to obey God's law instinctively. So that when the mind of God is known on a matter, *the point is settled*. There is no debate. There's no question. It's the end of the matter. "Here's what God says, so here's what we do."

Now this will happen when we have a proper respect for the authority of God *as God*, and we are convinced that he really *does* have our good in mind. This is a point, I think, that some people are not truly convinced of. Eve foolishly believed the slanderous accusation of the serpent that God wished to withhold something good from her...

But God really does have our good in mind. Listen to what Moses says in Deuteronomy 6:

²⁰ "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' ²¹ then *you shall say to your son*, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. ²³ And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. ²⁴ And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, *for our good always*, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day (Deut. 6:20-24)

And in chapter 10, he says:

¹² "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve

the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today *for your good?* (Deut. 10:12-13)

And the Lord says in Jeremiah,

“I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, *for their own good and the good of their children after them.* I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul” (Jer. 32:29-41)

Solomon tells his son, “I give you *good* precepts. There is great reward in keeping them.”

And then he offers himself as an example for them to follow. He says,

- ³ When *I* was a son with my father [*as you are now with me*],
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,
⁴ he taught me and said to me,
“Let your heart hold fast my words;
keep my commandments, and live.”

Do you see? This is the *same thing* that Solomon is now telling his sons. He’s saying, “My father told me what I’m now telling you—*Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.*”

If only we understood this—the connection between God’s law and life! You cannot live; you cannot prosper, apart from God’s law. His law, his commandments—which as fathers we are to

inculcate to our children—is not only the guarantee of *personal* happiness, but it is the very foundation of life and liberty and a just and prosperous society. Apart from God’s law (I tell you) we are doomed. Listen, the reason why the United States has enjoyed throughout its history unrivalled freedom, unparalleled prosperity is because God’s law was the foundation of our social order. There’s no getting around this. Those who say that the United States was founded upon enlightenment principles rather than upon God’s law, have absolutely no idea what in the world they’re talking about. Our Founders, and the vast majority of the American people in the colonies, were not rationalists. They were not secular progressives. They were Christians. They understood the world in Christian terms, in terms of God’s word, his law.

All the original state constitutions not only gave official recognition of the Christian faith, but required that office holders be Christians.

The state Constitution of Delaware: “Every person who shall be chosen a member of either house, or appointed to any office or place of trust...shall...also make and subscribe the following declaration, to wit: “I, _____, do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed forevermore; and I do acknowledge the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration.”

The state constitution of Massachusetts, concerning the office of governor: "no person shall be eligible to this office, unless...he shall declare himself to be of the Christian religion." "I, _____, do declare, that I believe the Christian religion, and have firm persuasion of its truth."

The other states had similar requirements for holding office. Some, like New Hampshire, even specifically required office-holders to be Protestant.

This, by the way, is why in article 6 of the U.S. Constitution it says, "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." It's not because the Founders wished to establish a secular federal government. It has to do with how they understood the relationship of the federal government to the states. Each of the states had their own religious test for office-holders. If the federal government also imposed a religious test, it might have the effect of contradicting and thus nullifying the religious tests used by the states. So, for example, if the federal government had a religious test like New Hampshire, requiring office holders to be protestant, but Maryland had no such requirement and elected a Roman Catholic representative to send to Washington, then the state would be denied the right to send whoever it wished to represent them. And to make sure there was no conflict between the states and the federal government, the Founders said, it's up to the states. It's not that the Founders

were not interested in having Christian statesmen in Washington. It's that they saw it as a matter of states' rights.

My point here is simply this: our country was founded by Christians. Were they perfect? No, of course not. No one is. But they had a Christian understanding of God, man, and law—the three most important things to understand correctly. And I submit to you that it is not by accident—indeed, it is a direct result of this—that the United States has been the freest, most prosperous society in the history of the world.

Where in the history of the world can you find a respect for the rule of law, equality under the law, the protection of the rights of the individual, a defense of the right to ownership of private property, and numerous other things that we take for granted in America, all of which are grounded in the Bible—in God's law? And where in the world is there greater freedom and prosperity? There's a reason for it. It has not been by chance that the United States has been the freest and most prosperous nation in the history of the world. It's because at the beginning a foundation was laid upon God's law. Now we are rapidly moving away from it. We are taking a jackhammer to our foundation. We're saying, "No you can't reference God's law in matters of public policy. Our legislation, our policy must have a secular purpose, and a secular basis. Any appeal to God and his law is illegitimate." This is what we are told, and what now by law is required.

It is only since these circumstances have come about that we have begun to see our national prosperity decline and our liberties being eroded one by one by the suffocating expansion of the role government into every area of life.

Nevertheless, historically the U.S. has enjoyed great blessings because of the foundation that was laid in the beginning upon God's law. And we continue to experience these blessings because of the cultural momentum that got us going in the beginning.

But the point is, you can't find anything like the blessings we enjoy here anywhere else. You can't find it under the rule of the despots of ancient history. You can't find it in the Islamic world. You can't find it in communist states or in the socialist countries of Europe.

God's law is given to us for our good. It works for the good of the individual, and it works for the good of entire societies.

Let me just give you one example. You know who Hugo Chavez is, don't you? That megalomaniac in Venezuela. This genius has decided that he knows better than God. Over the course of the last few years he's been engaged in the process of nationalizing a number of industries. Now, what's another word for nationalizing something? *Stealing* it. The government of Hugo Chavez sought out foreign investors, foreign companies to do business in

Venezuela. He said, "Come to Venezuela to do business." He promised them tax breaks—lower taxes in his country than in other countries in the region. Foreign money came pouring in. Companies set up shop. Factories were opened. Then Chavez announces that the government is going to take over these industries. He's going to *nationalize* them. So the capital these foreign investors laid out is stolen from them, and the profits they had hoped to make will never materialize. Too bad for the investors, but score one for Venezuela, right? After all, they're ahead by all the money the foreign investors poured into the country. But let me ask you something. Do you think anyone else is going to risk investing anything in Venezuela? I mean, would you? Chavez perhaps got a short term gain for his country; but long term? Well, that's a different story, isn't it? Foreign companies are going to look to put their money elsewhere, where there is security; where there is a respect for the ownership of private property. His breaking of God's law not only robbed these foreign investors, but he's also shot himself in the foot. And that's just the point. Keeping God's law is for your good. Breaking his commandments leads to ruin.

"I give you *good* precepts... Keep my commandments and *live*." Not simply, "be alive"; but *live!* This is what Solomon says his father told him. His father also said,

- ⁵ Get wisdom; get insight;
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.
- ⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;

- love her, and she will guard you.
- 7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever you get, get insight.
 - 8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;
she will honor you if you embrace her.
 - 9 She will place on your head a graceful garland;
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."

"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight." The first part of wisdom is to know that wisdom is worth getting. It's worth being pursued.

So how do we go about getting wisdom? Where does one acquire it?

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him (Jas. 1:5)

Ask God for it. Wisdom comes from him. He has all wisdom. Do you remember when we read Job 28? (vv. 1-28)

God made all things and so he knows all things. He knows what things are. He knows how one thing is related to another—the interrelationship of all the parts to each other and to the whole. He knows the end of a matter from the beginning.

If you want wisdom, go to the source. Cry out to God for it!

Now, someone will ask, "What? Is that it? Just pray, and God will zap me or something? I'll automatically, supernaturally be filled with wisdom?"

No. Pray to God for wisdom, and pray *fervently*. Pray without ceasing...and then search for wisdom with all your heart. Search like your life depends upon it, *because it does!*

2:1-10

So how do we do this? What does this search for wisdom look like in practical terms?

Let me suggest a few things:

1. Think long term. Always, always, *always* think long term. We are in the habit of only looking to the immediate consequences of our decisions and actions. But the wisdom of a course of action is proven by its long term, lasting results.

In the short term Judas was 30 pieces of silver richer for his betrayal of Christ. Short term gain. But in the long term? His soul was damned forever. And Jesus said of him, "It would have been better for that man had he never been born."

In the short term, it's easier to put off fixing that leak in your roof. It's always easier in the short term to procrastinate, isn't it? You don't have to do anything to procrastinate. That's why it's easy. In the short term it's *easy* to put off

fixing the leak. In the long term, however, it requires a far more troublesome repair, because the leak does extensive damage to your house.

In the short term it's far more interesting—far more fun—to spend discretionary income than to save for retirement. But long term, when you are no longer able to work, how are you going to support yourself?

Short term it's easier to tell your kids when they're little, "I'm too tired to play with you now, or too busy." But long term when they're in their teen years and in need of counsel, why are they going to listen to you if you haven't invested the time and energy to develop a relationship with them?

Always think long term. The wisdom of a course of action is proven by its long term, lasting results.

2. Look at the big picture. Consider how one thing is related to another. And especially consider the culture in which you live.

We all need to be sons of Issachar. Do you remember what Scripture says about the tribe of Issachar in the time of David? It says that their contribution to the defense of Israel was this, that they understood the times and what Israel should do. We also must understand the times in which we

live. If we are going to live faithfully in our generation we have to be aware of what's going on around us. We must be alert. We must understand not only which direction our culture is moving, but why it is moving in that direction, and how we might help to stem the tide, and how we might defend our children from being sucked up into it.

3. Turn off the television, or at least drastically limit the viewing of commercial television. Remember: GIGO—Garbage In, Garbage Out. You cannot have a steady stream of input from commercial television and expect to advance in wisdom. Period.

It's a waste of time. No, it's *worse* than a waste of time. Not only does it keep you from doing something productive and worthwhile, it is also influencing the way you think in very subtle ways, ways that have to be *unlearned* if you are going to grow in wisdom. Learning is difficult enough as it is; but it's especially difficult when you have to *unlearn* something first. Turn off the television.

4. Learn to think critically. Remember that we are living in an environment, in a culture, that is rebellion against God. This is a given. It's a fact. There's no denying it. Consequently, we must not automatically accept the interpretation of reality that is given to us through traditional sources in the popular culture, knowing that if these sources are not themselves

consciously striving to view the world as God sees it, then their interpretation of reality is necessarily skewed.

So we must suspend our natural inclination to trust the messenger. We have a natural inclination to give the benefit of the doubt to whoever it is who is speaking to us, unless of course we've been burned by him before (if he's been found to be unreliable.) But we have to realize that the underlying assumptions, the worldview, of the powers that be that inform and shape the popular culture are antithetical to the Christian faith. So that as they report something on the news, we should regard their interpretation of the event as being necessarily suspect. Or as a story is portrayed on film the actions of the characters are going to be presented (interpreted) in light of the storyteller's worldview. And it's pretty much a given that the storyteller's worldview is going to be contrary to the Christian worldview.

We have to understand: there is no *objective* presentation of the news. There is *no* objective story-telling. *It's all interpretation and advocacy.* It's all done with a view to convincing you, persuading you of a particular view of reality. You have to realize this. And you have to ask yourself, "Is this presentation of reality really in accord with reality?"

So we must examine everything, evaluate everything. This is true even (and it's sad to say) when the source of the

information is the church. The churches today are woefully lacking in wisdom. (Church growth techniques make for short term increases in attendance. But at what price?)

5. Read. If you want wisdom, read. If you are not willing to read, you are not interested in wisdom. You have to be taking in...

You have to be reading substantive material from reliable sources.

6. Write down your reflections on what you read.
7. Ask questions