

THREE REASONS TO ENROLL IN THE SCHOOL OF SOLOMON

1 The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel: [so that the reader] ²may know wisdom and understanding; may appreciate sound teaching; ³may receive instruction in wise behavior, namely, in righteousness and justice and equity; ⁴so that the naïve may receive prudence; so that the young man may gain knowledge and discretion; ⁵so that the wise man may listen and learn more; so that the man who possess understanding may acquire the ability to comprehend deep teaching, ⁶[namely, the ability] to understand a proverb and a parable, the sayings and the riddles spoken by the wise. (Prov. 1:1-6)*

**Literally, “to discern the words of understanding”*

A note on the Scripture text that being used in this study: The *American Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, along with the original Greek and Hebrew, have been used in an effort to achieve the greatest degree of accuracy and clarity. Where words or phrases have been added to the original text in an effort to better express its meaning, those words or phrases have usually been indicated by means of [brackets].

Introduction

We may view the Book of Proverbs as a divine “university.” The “president” and most prominent “professor” of this “university” is King Solomon.

The wisdom he shares with us is not his own; it is, rather, the divine wisdom of God graciously imparted to him for the benefit of all of God’s people. Solomon made a request of the LORD that was well pleasing to Him and granted by Him:

Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong, for who is able to govern this great people of yours? ¹⁰The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹So God said to him, Because you have asked for this... ¹²I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. (1 Kg. 3:9-12)

Let us briefly consider the history of the founding and development of this “university.” It appears that it was during the reign of the godly King Jehoshaphat, (60-70 years after Solomon,) that a collection of Solomon’s proverbs was compiled, (namely, Proverbs 10:1-22:16,) and the first half of what is now the Book of Proverbs was “published.” According to Proverbs 25:1, a second collection of Solomon’s proverbs was compiled in the days of King Hezekiah, (approximately 125 years after Jehoshaphat.) The whole Book of Proverbs (all 31 chapters) may have been “bound together” as one complete volume at the time of Hezekiah, or possibly at the time of Israel’s restoration under Ezra the scribe.

It is important for us to understand the philosophy/theology of the School of Solomon: Why do they teach the courses they offer at this “university?” What is their viewpoint? What do they intend to accomplish? What is their vision? The Book of Proverbs is not merely a collection of wise sayings (“pious advice”) intended to help us lead peaceful, profitable and moral lives in this world. On the contrary, the Book of Proverbs is divine instruction given to God’s covenant people, designed to teach us how to live as citizens of God’s kingdom and how to apply the principles of His kingdom in our everyday lives; in other words, how to think and act like God in a godly way.

Proverbs 1:1-6 presents the “university’s” statement of purpose: What does God want you to receive from the Book of Proverbs that will help you grow in your Christian life unto the glory of God? As we give our attention to these verses, let us consider, “Three Reasons to Enroll in the School of Solomon,” or, stated another way, “Three Reasons to Study the Book of Proverbs.”

I. We Should Study the Book of Proverbs in Order to Gain Wisdom

The LORD has given us the Book of Proverbs in order that we might *“know wisdom and understanding.”* The Hebrew expression, “to know,” has the connotation, “to become personally acquainted with someone or something;” to digest a subject and have it become part of your life. By way of illustration, it is like learning a foreign language so as to be able to communicate in that new language.

A specific purpose of the Book of Proverbs is to enable us *“to know wisdom.”* Whereas knowledge is the accumulation and mastery of facts, wisdom is the ability to apply knowledge to life so as to lead a godly life, it is the ability to know how to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Wisdom is the ability to think and act like God. Furthermore, the objective of Proverbs is to enable to know *“to know wisdom and understanding”* (or, *“discipline;”* מוֹסֵר.) You acquire wisdom as you submit to the instruction of God’s Word and allow it to direct and discipline your life. The Lord Jesus Christ directs us to submit to His discipline, to become His disciples, He exhorts us, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰My yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matt. 11:28-30.)

The LORD has given us the Book of Proverbs in order that we may *“appreciate sound teaching,”* (literally, that we may *“discern the words of understanding.”*) This book of Scripture has been given to us so that we may recognize, appreciate and profit from those words (i.e.; that teaching) that are true, those words and teachings that impart truth and are in accordance with God’s truth. The more we are exposed to such words/teaching, and the more we respond to them with an open mind and a receptive heart, the more we are able to recognize, appreciate and profit from them. Note the testimony of Psalm 1:1a, 2, *“Blessed is the man ...*

whose delight is in the law of Jehovah, and on his law he meditates day and night." Again, by way of illustration: You develop an understanding of and an appreciation for good music by being exposed to it and being receptive to it.

The LORD has given us the Book of Proverbs in order that we might *"receive instruction in wise behavior."* In other words, so that we may learn how to think in a godly way. The term, *"wise behavior,"* is derived from the Hebrew word שִׁבֵּל, which, according to Keil and Delitzsch (*Commentary on Proverbs*, Vol.1, p.55), has a root meaning of "to entwine, to involve." Thus, one of the reasons our heavenly Father has given us the Book of Proverbs is to help train us and instruct us as to how to work our way through complicated spiritual issues and moral problems. The object of this instruction/discipline (מוֹסֵר) is that we may gain an acquaintance with *"righteousness, justice and equity* (or, *"fairness."*) In other words, that we may become like the Lord Himself: *"Jehovah is righteous; he loves righteousness"* (Psl. 11:7.) We become increasingly proficient in righteous thinking/living as we 1) meditate on God's Word: *"I have more understanding than all my teachers, because your testimonies are my meditation"* (Psl. 119:99;) and 2) as we put into practice what we are taught : *"I understand more than the aged, because I have kept your precepts"* (Psl. 119:100.)

The first reason we should study the Book of Proverbs is that we may gain wisdom; that we as Christians may gain the ability to think and act like God our heavenly Father.

II. We Should Study the Book of Proverbs in Order to Learn Prudence

A second purpose of the Book of Proverbs is to enable *"the naïve may receive prudence."*

Who are *"the naïve"* (or, *"the simple"*)? Proverbs 14:15 provides a definition: *"The naïve believes every word, but a prudent man carefully considers his steps."* The *"naïve,"* or, *"simple,"* are those who are gullible, those who have no discernment. The naïve person lacks the ability to critically evaluate ideas and suggestions; he just accepts anything and everything anybody presents to him. He will just act without considering the consequences, without considering the moral significance of his decisions; for example, if someone suggests to the naïve, "Let's do drugs!" he will thoughtlessly consent. The naïve believe "spaghetti tree" stories: Lisa and some of her friends were sitting in a restaurant when one young man decided to convince her that spaghetti grows on trees. Soon everyone else around the table took the cue, and they all argued the point convincingly. After several minutes, they had Lisa persuaded that spaghetti does grow on trees. (*Our Daily Bread*, 4/11/92.) The naïve believe "spaghetti stories" about life, such as: Live for yourself! Live for today! Don't give a thought to responsibility! Don't respect authority!

One purpose of the Book of Proverbs is to teach the naïve *“prudence.”* What is *“prudence”*? The latter part of Proverbs 14:15 provides the definition: *“a prudent man carefully considers his steps;”* i.e.; he carefully considers what he is doing. Prudence is the ability to exhibit an examining, evaluating, and discriminating mind; the prudent man asks such questions as, “What are we about to do?” “What is he teaching me?” “Is this behavior good or bad?” “Is this teaching true or false?” A prudent man is going to think before he acts; he is going to critically evaluate ideas and suggestions in the light of God’s Word. A prudent man is going to have a long range view and take into account the consequences of a particular course of action, he will consider such questions as, “What will this mean for me tomorrow?” “How will this action or choice affect the rest of my life?” “How will this decision affect my eternal destiny?” “What effect will it have upon my relationship with the LORD?”

We should study the Book of Proverbs in order that we may learn prudence. As we study the Book of Proverbs we will be taught by God how to act sensibly, as opposed to acting thoughtlessly or naively. We will learn how to think before we act so as to make wise and godly choices.

III. We Should Study the Book of Proverbs in Order to Receive Knowledge

The LORD has given us the Book of Proverbs so that the young may learn *“knowledge and discretion.”*

Two characteristics of youth are inexperience and impulsiveness. What is needed is *“knowledge”* (the accumulation of facts, the building blocks of education) and *“discretion”* (the ability to use knowledge as the basis for making wise decisions and planning a godly course of action.)

Furthermore, the LORD has given us the Book of Proverbs so that *“the wise man may listen and learn more.”*

A truly wise man will always be willing to listen and always be ready to learn: *“Instruct a wise man and he will become wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning”* (Prov. 9:9.) Note, too, the warning of the Apostle Paul given to the church at Corinth: *“If anyone thinks that he knows anything exhaustively, he does not yet know as he ought to know”* (1 Cori. 8:2.) Note: The perfect tense of the Greek verb, γίνωσκω, (meaning “to know,”) has the sense of knowing something exhaustively. Paul is here speaking about the man who thinks he knows all there is to know about spiritual things. The Apostle Peter exhorts us, *“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet. 3:18.)

The LORD has given us the Book of Proverbs so that *“the man who possess understanding may acquire the ability to comprehend deep teaching.”*

We might say that the school of Solomon also offers “graduate level courses” intended for the mature man of understanding, so that he might *“acquire the ability to comprehend deep teaching.”* The Hebrew word translated *“deep teaching”* (חֲבִילָה) has the root meaning, “to bind,” or, “to wind tightly as a rope.” Thus, “deep teachings” are closely knit teachings that take much experience in godly thinking to unravel and understand; they are teachings that are tightly bound up, they are not readily accessible to the casual student.

Verse 6 seems to further explain the meaning of the phrase, when it states that one purpose of the Book of Proverbs is to enable us *“to understand a proverb,”* to comprehend the meaning of those pithy sayings that contain a vast wealth of spiritual knowledge packed into a short, memorable and sometimes enigmatic statement; ... to understand *“a parable,”* a simple story that illustrates spiritual truth but which is only appreciated by those who have spiritual understanding and enlightenment; ... to understand *“the sayings ... [spoken by] the wise,”* words that at times may be very difficult, like those of the apostle Paul; or words that may appear to be very simple while containing a great deal of spiritual truth for those who are able to fathom them, like the words of the apostle John; ... and to understand *“the riddles [spoken by] the wise,”* here is wisdom deposited in a locked safe, accessible only to those who possess the ability to unlock it—the Book of Proverb is intended to train us so that we may develop such ability.

We should study the Book of Proverbs in order that we may receive knowledge and increase in godly knowledge. As you study the Book of Proverbs the LORD will impart to you a deeper understanding of Himself and His ways at whatever stage of our Christian life you may presently find yourself.

Conclusion

In the opening verses of the Book of Proverbs we are introduced to three reasons why we should study this particular portion of Scripture: 1) in order that we may gain godly wisdom; 2) in order that we may learn prudence; and 3) in order that we may receive godly knowledge and an ever increasing measure of it.

May the LORD be pleased to make this book profitable for the growth and maturity of our Christian lives unto His own glory.