

BE TEACHABLE

Introduction

When I think of the horse, I think of a majestic, stately animal. I picture a beautiful, chestnut-colored beast, quietly grazing in the midst of the pasture. I remember the horse as an animal that calmly comes near to the fence railing to receive a lump of sugar from your hand and to allow you to stroke its velvety head and mane. Yet, in Psalm 32:9, God tells us, *“Do not be like the horse.”* I suppose that if I were to attend a rodeo, or watch a horse being broken, I would have a very different impression of the horse, and a better understanding of what the Lord is saying in Psalm 32:9.

By nature the horse is a wild beast that resists man’s efforts to domesticate him. As soon as the saddle is placed upon him for the first time, as soon as the cowboy lifts himself upon his back, there is trouble: he kicks out his hind legs, he thrusts back his head, he jumps up and down, spinning round and round in a cloud of dust.

The LORD says, *“Do not be like the horse”* (wild and unrestrained, self-willed.) He also says, *“Do not be like the mule,”* (which is known for its stubbornness and resistance.) For our next topical study from the Book of Proverbs we turn our attention to the positive side of this subject, the need to be teachable. Let us strive to be teachable in every part of our lives, in order that we may comply with our LORD’s counsel that is for our good and for His glory.

I. Be Teachable, by Appreciating the Value of Truth (Proverbs 23:23)

Buy the truth and do not sell it; indeed, buy wisdom and instruction and understanding! (Prov. 23:23)

The counsel to *“buy the truth”*—along with *“wisdom, instruction and understanding”*—*“and do not sell it”* is emphasizing the fact that these are precious spiritual commodities; they are worth acquiring and retaining. *“Truth, wisdom, instruction, understanding”* are things worth “purchasing” and worth keeping. The fact that we are to “buy” these things, as opposed to merely receiving them, points out that there is “a price” to be paid—these precious spiritual commodities are not just casually picked up, they are attained by diligence, obedience and sacrifice.

The reason *“instruction”* is listed among such valuable commodities as truth, wisdom and understanding is because instruction is the means whereby we acquire those other valuable spiritual commodities. Consider Proverbs 4:1,5-9,

Listen, my son, to a father’s instruction, pay attention so as to gain understanding ... ⁵Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget the words I

speak or turn away from them. ⁶Do not forsake wisdom, and she will guard you; love her, and she will watch over you. ⁷Wisdom is the primary thing; therefore, get wisdom. Indeed, give all that you have acquired in order to acquire understanding. ⁸Hold her in high esteem, and she will exalt you; if you embrace her, she will honor you. ⁹She will set a garland of grace upon your head, and present you with a crown of beauty. (Prov. 4:1, 5-9)

We may view this passage as a guidance counseling session in which the godly father is offering wise counsel to his son. "Son, let's sit down and talk about your future." "Great Dad. Tell me, where am I going to make the most money, how am I going to have the greatest success, how can I attain the best security? What's the best investment, Dad?" "Son, invest in divine truth and wisdom (knowing God and His ways). This is far more valuable than all the money, success, and security the world can offer."

Verse 7 tells us, "*wisdom is the primary thing;*" and we are instructed to "*get wisdom.*" "*Indeed, give all that you have acquired in order to acquire understanding.*" Take all that you have acquired and make that the payment with which you "purchase" wisdom, because there is nothing more valuable. Note the connection between divine wisdom and the kingdom of God. In His parable about the kingdom in Matthew 13:45-46, Jesus gives us the same council as does the godly father of Proverbs: "*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*"

Verse 6 counsels us, "*Do not forsake wisdom;*" on the contrary, according to verse 8, we are to love wisdom, value it, and honor it. Do not allow other things to become your number one priority (such things as a career, or anything else.) Furthermore, do not toss godly wisdom away as something that belongs to childhood or as something that is irrelevant, outdated or foolish.

II. Be Teachable, by Applying Your Heart to Seek Knowledge (Proverbs 22:17; Proverbs 15:14)

Make your ear attentive and listen to the words of the wise; apply your heart to the knowledge I impart. (Prov. 22:17)

Proverbs 22:17a instructs us to be receptive to the truth and wisdom of God. We are to pay attention to it, as opposed to ignoring it; we are to accept it, as opposed to resisting or rejecting it; we are to appreciate it, as opposed to taking it for granted. We must not succumb to the temptation of dismissing it because it is repetitive (what in life is not repetitive?) or because it is not entertaining (there are many things in life that are not entertaining but are nevertheless necessary.)

Proverbs 22:17b goes on to inform us that being receptive to the truth is not enough; what is absolutely essential is that we apply our hearts to the truth of God. We must let the truth of God enter the ear, pass through the mind, and reach the heart—let the truth of God penetrate the very core of your being with conviction, asking such questions as these: What does this mean for my life? What am I going to do about it? We must be like those who first heard the gospel on the Day of Pentecost: *"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"* (Acts 2:37.) We must allow the truth of God to penetrate all the way to our heart, and then let it arise from our heart and influence our life, changing and controlling our thoughts and conduct. Such is the counsel the Apostle James gives with regard to the Word of God:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. (Jam. 1:22-25)

We should learn a lesson from the testimony of a young Korean Christian:

One day a young Christian came into a mission station in Korea to visit the man who had been instrumental in his conversion to Christ. After the customary greetings, the missionary asked the reason for his coming. "I have been memorizing some verses in the Bible," he said, "and I wanted to quote them to you." He had walked hundreds of miles just to recite some Scripture verses to his father in the faith.

The missionary listened as he recited without error the entire Sermon on the Mount. He commended the young man for his remarkable feat of memory, but then cautioned that he must not only "say" the Scriptures but also practice them. With glowing face, the man responded, "Oh, that is the way I learn them. I tried to memorize them but they wouldn't stick, so I hit on this plan. First, I would learn a verse. Then I would practice what the verse said on a neighbor who was not a Christian. After that I found that I could remember it." (*Our Daily Bread*, 3/18/92)

The heart of the man who has understanding seeks knowledge; but the mouth of fools feeds on folly. (Prov. 15:14)

Proverbs 15:14a indicates that the state or condition of the heart determines a man's ability to receive knowledge and profit from it: *"the heart of the man who has understanding seeks knowledge."*

In the light of this fact, let us make such passages as the following to be our prayer:

Give your servant a discerning heart ... so that I may distinguish between good and evil (1 Kgs. 3:9,) such was Solomon's request, a request that was pleasing to the LORD

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezk. 36:26-27;) our prayer should be that God would fulfill His promise in us

... since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰We pray this in order that you may walk in a way that is worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. (Col. 1:9-10;) the apostle's prayer for the Colossian church should be our prayer as well

III. Be Teachable, Even When It Is Hard (Proverbs 19:27)

Stop listening to instruction, my son, but then you will stray from the words of knowledge. (Prov. 19:27)

In Proverbs 19:27a the godly father of Proverbs facetiously instructs his son to stop receiving instruction. In so doing, the father is addressing that impulse and temptation with which the son grapples, namely, the desire to stop listening and stop submitting to the instruction and discipline (the Hebrew word, מוֹסֵר, means both instruction and discipline) of the godly father and the heavenly Father. Note Hebrews 12:11, *"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."*

But, as Proverbs 19:27b indicates, if you give in to that impulse, it will not be long before you will *"stray from the words of knowledge."* Because of our sinful tendency to drift away from or ignore *"the words of knowledge,"* the heavenly Father must enforce compliance to His commandments by means of continual teaching and also, when necessary, disciplinary measures in our lives.

The point of this proverb: Divine instruction, especially as it comes in the form of rebuke and corrective discipline, is hard, but it is also essential. Its necessary and gracious function is to keep us on the pathway of life that leads to spiritual maturity. May we acknowledge and accept the heavenly Father's instruction and discipline, as did the Psalmist:

Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe your word. ...⁷¹It is good for me that I have been afflicted; so that I may learn your statutes. ...⁷⁵I know, O Jehovah, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. (Psl. 119:67,71,75)

Take note, also, of Proverbs 12:1; *"Whoever loves correction loves knowledge; but he who hates rebuke is brutish."* To "love correction" here means to accept it and to appreciate its purpose and its motivation: that it is administered by the heavenly Father as part of His love (note, again, Psalm 119:67,71,75 quoted above.) If you "love correction" you are demonstrating that you have a love for knowledge; you have a desire to know God and His ways, even if it means undergoing a painful learning experience.

"But he who hates rebuke is brutish." To resist that correction and reject it, spiritually puts you on the same level as that of a brute beast, note once more Psalm 32:9, *"Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you."* The horse does not accept the discipline of the saddle because he does not understand that it is intended to make him useful; indeed, he has no interest in becoming useful, he simply wants his unbridled, wild freedom.

When the instruction God brings into our lives is hard, may our mind be enlightened and our spirit be made accepting by these words of Scripture: *"The ear that heeds life-giving rebuke shall dwell among the wise"* (Prov. 15:31.) The rebukes sent by God are intended to lead us into life and make us fit to inherit a permanent place among the wise; that is to say, among those who know God and who act and think like God.

IV. Be Teachable, In Order to Receive Life and Avoid Destruction (Proverbs 10:17)

He who heeds correction is walking in the way of life; but he who ignores a rebuke will go astray. (Prov. 10:17)

One source of personal assurance is our teachability: If you listen to God when He corrects you, and seek to make the changes that are pleasing to Him, you can be assured that you are traveling the road of life. By way of illustration: If a pilot makes the navigational corrections dictated to him by the air controller he can be assured that he is on line to safely reach his destination. But what happens if he ignores those directives? He is headed for destruction.

But *"he who ignores a rebuke will go astray."* If you forsake the LORD's correction, you are making a very serious mistake. You may find yourself confronted with a more severe measure of reproof and correction, note Leviticus 26:23-24, *"If in spite of these things [the previously mentioned measures of discipline and punishment] you do not accept my correction but*

continue to be hostile toward me, ²⁴I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over." Such is the LORD's warning to Israel if they continued to reject His correction and His lordship over their lives. The one who habitually rejects the LORD's instruction and discipline will finally be abandoned by God to pursue his own way unto the eternal punishment of damnation: *"since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind"* (Rom. 1:28.) Let us be careful to note John 10:27-28a, where the Lord Jesus declares, *"My sheep **respond** to my voice; I know them and they **follow** me. ²⁸I give them eternal life."*

Conclusion

Our LORD urges us to be neither like the horse (with a wild and unrestrained spirit; a headstrong, self-willed spirit,) nor like the mule, (with a stubborn and defiant spirit.) He also informs us that those who are truly His sheep are responsive to His instruction and direction. A teachable spirit—a positive, life-changing response to the Word of God—is a mark of genuine Christianity; it is a characteristic of a true child of God.