Introduction

How many New Year’s resolutions have you made for this year? How many of them have you kept?

There appeared an article in the newspaper about people and their New Year’s resolutions. Lisa resolved, “If I were to make a resolution, it would be not to look in the past and regret what I’ve done. If anything, learn from your past and get on with your life.” Dorothy’s intention, “Do not defer or neglect doing something that should be done.” Susan stated, “My resolution this year is to be more positive about life.”

Several people interviewed testified that, whereas their past resolutions tended to focus on health issues (dieting, smoking, etc.), the coming year’s resolutions would focus more on attitudes and values.

In the passage of Scripture presently before us the godly father of Proverbs, (and our heavenly Father,) directs our attention to the attitudes, values and life style that are to characterize our lives as Christians. Let us now consider the five practical lessons in Christian living that are presented to us here in this third chapter of Proverbs.

I. Keep a Firm Hold on Kindness and Integrity

As we make our way through “the crowded shopping mall of life,” it is very easy for us to become separated from these twin virtues, kindness and integrity.

You often come into contact with people who are unkind—they may be rude, harsh, inconsiderate, hateful, thoughtless, or thankless. As we observe their unkindness in dealing with others, we are tempted to imitate their ungodly
example. As we experience their unkindness in their dealings with us, we are tempted to treat them in the same way. But the counsel and commandment of our heavenly Father is this: “Do not let kindness and integrity forsake you.”

You also come into contact with people who are untruthful—sometimes they are less than honest, sometimes they are downright liars and crooks. Again, as you observe their less than honest dealings with others, you are tempted to imitate their example. As you experience their dishonest dealings with yourself, you are tempted to treat them in the same way. But once again, pay attention to the counsel and commandment of our heavenly Father: “Do not let kindness and integrity forsake you.”

How can we avoid becoming separated from these twin virtues of kindness and integrity? The godly father of Proverbs instructs us, “tie them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart” (vs. 3b.) That is to say, we must make the effort, we must do what is necessary, to remember that we are to imitate our Savior rather than imitate the world.

What does the Lord require of us as Christians? The answers come through the Apostle Paul’s counsel to the Roman church:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will ... 21Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:2,21)

How does the Lord require us to live as Christians? Consider such passages as the following:

But love your enemies, do good to them ... Then ... you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Lk. 6:35b-36)

These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and execute the judgment of truth and peace in your courts; 17do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this, declares Jehovah. (Zech. 8:16-17)

The best way to remember is to get into the habit of practicing these twin virtues of kindness and integrity: take the initiative in displaying these virtues, rather than reacting with their opposite ungodly alternatives.

What is the reward and blessing that result from imitating our Lord Jesus Christ in the practice of kindness and integrity? The answer: “you will find favor and a good reputation in the sight of God and man” (vs. 4.)
II. Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart

Be a **practicing** Christian, not just a **professing** Christian. By way of illustration: A crowd of spectators was watching a famous tightrope walker perform at Niagara Falls. First the performer successfully walked across the raging falls on his tightrope. Then he walked across the falls pushing a wheelbarrow before him. Next he pushed his wheelbarrow with a 150 lb. in it. Just then a fire broke out in the woods behind the spectators. The flames forced them forward to the edge of the falls. The tightrope walker urged them, “Save yourselves by trusting me. Each one of you, one by one, get into my wheelbarrow and I’ll carry you across the falls to safety.”

A **professing** spectator would be one who merely affirms his belief that the tightrope walker is able to perform the feat of successfully carrying a man across the falls. A **practicing** believer is one who actually climbs into the wheelbarrow and trusts the tightrope walker to carry him to safety. The same is true with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, we must be **practicing believers**, entrusting our life and soul to the Savior, and doing so daily in the everyday affairs of life.

Be a practicing believer by really committing yourself to Christ and His Word. Accept His Word: “Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have believed and know that you are the Holy One of God’” (Jn. 6:68-69.) Act upon His Word: “[Jesus]’ mother said to the servants, ‘Whatever he tells you to do, do it’” (Jn. 2:5.) Interact with His Word: “we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, that works in you who are believing” (1 Thessalonians 2:13; the present active participle of the Greek verb πίστευω, “to believe,” indicates an active, ongoing faith or commitment. In contrast to active, dynamic faith in the Lord Jesus, consider the effect of unbelief: “[Jesus] could not do any mighty work there, although he did lay his hands upon a few sick people and heal them. “He was amazed at their unbelief. He went around to all the villages teaching” (Mk. 6:5-6.)

Be a **practicing** Christian, rather than a **practical** unbeliever. There is the great tendency for men to depend upon their own understanding, instead of depending upon the Word of God. In other words, the tendency for men to put their complete confidence in themselves—their own reasoning, feelings, schemes, plans, impulses—rather than in the LORD and His Word. But Scripture warns, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov. 14:12.) Through the prophet Isaiah, the LORD said to king Ahaz, “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand [at all]” (Isa. 7:9.) In contrast, listen to King Jehoshaphat’s counsel to Israel: “Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in Jehovah your God and you will be upheld” (2 Chron. 20:20b.)
There is also the tendency for professing Christians to be selective in their trust of the LORD. They may trust Him with regard to the great issues of eternity, but not with the issues of everyday life. They may trust Him with regard to “spiritual” things, but not with the decisions that relate to the temporal things of this present world. They may trust Him with regard to the “religious” issues of life, but not with regard to “the really important and practical” issues.

Be a practicing Christian, and discover the LORD to be completely trustworthy. “In all your ways acknowledge Him” [His sovereign lordship, His fatherly concern, His divine wisdom and goodness,] “and He will direct your paths.” He will lead you in the way that is good, and into deeper fellowship with Himself, and finally into His everlasting kingdom.

[When] the LORD is your shepherd [when you trust Him and submit to His leading]; [then] you shall not lack anything; 2 [for] he will make you lie down in green pastures; he will lead you beside still waters. He will restore you soul. He will guide you in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Indeed, you shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and you will fear no evil; for the LORD will be with you; His rod and His staff, will comfort you (Psl. 23:1-4.)

Consider the Apostle Paul’s testimony: “I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (2 Tim. 1:12.) After the initial act of faith, the act of entrusting himself body and soul into the hands of the Lord Jesus the Savior, Paul has come to know by experience that the Lord Jesus is completely faithful and reliable.

III. Let Your Life be Governed by Godly Fear

The counsel of Proverbs is, “Do not be wise in your own eyes.” Note that this admonition of verse 7a occurs in between the admonishment of verses 5-6 (the admonition to trust in the LORD) and that of verse 7b (the admonition to fear the LORD.) To be “wise in one’s own eyes” is referring to that thinking and outlook by which a man puts himself at the center (turning his back on God) and seeks to design his own standard for life (rejecting the absolute standard of God.) Note Isaiah 5:20-21, where this same phrase is employed:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Isa. 5:20-21.) Here are men who invert and pervert the natural God-given order of things, because they are “wise in their own eyes.”

Note, too, the Apostle Paul’s evaluation of mankind: ... although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they
became fools... since they refused to acknowledge God in their thinking, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things that are not proper. (Rom. 1:21-22,28)

The alternative to being wise in your own eyes is being governed by a godly fear: “fear Jehovah and turn away from evil” (vs. 7b.) The reference is to that wholesome fear that causes us to take seriously the warnings of God:

Do you not realize that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor those who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-10)

Now the works of the sinful nature are well known, such as: sexual immorality, moral impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatreds, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and other such things. I warn you again, just as I [previously] warned you, that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

It is a wholesome and godly fear that moves us to act upon those divine warnings, as was the case with Noah: “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark by which his family was saved. By faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (Heb. 11:7.)

Let us bear in mind that this wholesome fear of God is itself a gracious work of God in the hearts of His people:

“I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me” (Jer. 32:39-40.)

When your life is governed by this wholesome and healthy fear of the LORD it will lead you in the way of blessing: “This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones” (vs. 8.) Note, also, such passages as ...

How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you. (Psl. 31:19)

The reward for humility and the fear of Jehovah is riches and honor and life. (Prov. 22:4)
IV. Honor the LORD with Your Possessions

The command of Scripture is to honor the LORD with “the first fruits of all your harvest.” “The first fruits” are the first and the best; we worship the LORD not only with hymns and prayers, but with the giving of the first and the best of our material income.

Why is this the command of God? What does it serve to accomplish? First, the giving of the first fruits is an expression of true worship and devotion, because it is costly. When Araunah offered to give David his threshing floor and oxen as a gift to offer up unto the LORD, David replied, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to Jehovah my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them” (2 Sam. 24:24.) Second, the giving of the first fruits is an acknowledgement of the fact that all belongs to the LORD and all we have has been graciously given to us by Him, as the Psalmist reminds us, “the earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof” (Psl. 24:1.) Third, the giving of the first fruits is a testimony that the LORD holds first place in our lives and everything else is in submission to Him: “And God spoke all these words: 2 I am Jehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 You shall have no other gods besides me” (Ex. 20:1-3.) Fourth, the giving of the first fruits is an acknowledgement that our life is dependent upon the LORD (not upon our material possessions,) and that we consciously choose to depend upon Him (rather than upon our money and possessions.) Note how the poor widow exemplified this truth:

“[Jesus] called his disciples to himself and said to them, I tell you the truth, This poor widow has given more than all those who are depositing offerings into the treasury; 44 because each of them gave from their abundance; but she out of her poverty gave all that she had, her entire income” (Mk. 12:43-44.)

The faithful promise of Scripture is that those who honor the LORD shall be honored by the LORD: “then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” (vs. 10.) Note, also, 1 Samuel 2:30, “Therefore Jehovah, the God of Israel, declares, ... those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be distained.”

V. Accept the LORD’s Fatherly Discipline

Having spoken about prosperity and blessing from the LORD (verses 9-10,) the next verses go on to speak about discipline from the LORD.

In solemn and tender terms (“my son”) the godly father of Proverbs urges us not to reject the discipline of the LORD. We desire life to be easy and comfortable, and we resist any form of discipline. As the writer to the Hebrews acknowledges, “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” (Heb. 12:11.)

But as children of God in Christ Jesus, we are to expect the heavenly Father to love us enough to administer His discipline to our lives. We must realize that this divine discipline (administered by a manifold variety of trials and/or hardships) is intended to train and shape our lives for the heavenly kingdom of God:

“[God disciplines us] for our benefit, so that we may share in his holiness” (Heb. 12:10b.)

We must realize that this divine discipline is an evidence of the LORD’s fatherly love for us:

“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. What son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons” (Heb. 12:7-8.)

“Jehovah rebukes those whom he loves, just as a father [rebukes] the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:12.)

We must realize that the right response to such discipline is to submit to it and be transformed by it:

“Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe your word ... It is good for me that I have been afflicted; so that I may learn your statutes” (Psl. 119:67,71.)

“... we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!” (Heb. 12:9.)

Conclusion

In this passage of Scripture the godly father of Proverbs (indeed, our heavenly Father Himself), has directed our attention to the attitudes, values, and lifestyle that are to characterize our lives as Christians. The LORD has here presented us with five practical lessons in Christian living: 1) Keep a firm hold on kindness and integrity; 2) Trust in the LORD with all your heart; 3) Let your life be governed by godly fear; 4) Honor the LORD with your possessions; and 5) Accept the LORD’s fatherly discipline.

Having been exposed to these lessons from the Word of God and from the heavenly Father Himself, let us bear in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, “If you understand
these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (Jn. 13:17,) and let us respond accordingly.