

5. Wise Words for Families (2Q 2019—Family Seasons)

Biblical material: Prov. 5:3–14; Matt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 7:3, 4; Prov. 13:22; 14:26; 17:22; 23:13; 31:10–31; Prov. 3:5, 6.

Quotes

- Wisdom stands at the turn in the road and calls upon us publicly, but we consider it false and despise its adherents. *Khalil Gibran*
- Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom. *Thomas Jefferson*
- By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and Third by experience, which is the bitterest. *Confucius*
- Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance. *George Bernard Shaw*
- The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing. *Socrates*
- By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you'll become happy; if you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher. *Socrates*

Questions

Why is the fear of the Lord only the beginning of wisdom? Why should we seek wisdom, especially in relation to our families? How can these proverbs from the Bible help us? In the context of the great controversy what is true wisdom? How do we relate this back to the God of wisdom?

Bible summary

Prov. 5:3–14 warns against the adulterous woman. Jesus reminds us of the basis for marriage in Matt. 19:5. 1 Cor. 7:3, 4 speaks of marital duties one to another. Our responsibility to later generations is emphasized in Prov. 13:22. Our commitment to God influences our children (Prov. 14:26). A cheerful heart is good medicine (Prov. 17:22). Discipline is necessary (Prov. 23:13). A truly committed wife is priceless (Prov. 31:10–31). The best is always to trust in the Lord (Prov. 3:5, 6).

Comment

The book of Proverbs contains a great deal of practical advice, especially directed towards families and relationships. The point is “for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young” (Prov. 1:2-4 NIV).

Proverbs are a common part of all cultures—those pithy sayings that sum up a particular situation. Of course, everyday proverbs can often be in opposition: “Many hands make light work” as opposed to “Too many cooks spoil the broth”!

Sometimes common sayings can appear to be profound, yet are really just truisms—something that is obvious: “It is what it is.” Then there are those proverbs that really don't add anything or are just plain obscure. I had an aunt who talked in proverbs, though they were often more like riddles! Such obvious statements as “every sparrow has its nest” or “there's not a tree without branches”—which did little to add to my childhood wisdom...

Then there were the ones that to this day I still haven't worked out: "A fish in a field eats no grass." "Misty mornings, happy yawnings." "Apples know not that they are not pears." "Chestnuts and hazelnuts do not siblings make." "Foxes and rabbits share good habits." I would try and try to find some deep meaning, but in the end I had to admit defeat. Some "wise observations" are nothing at all.

But when it comes to the Biblical book of Proverbs, though some may require some deep thinking, they are there to help us gain some wisdom to help us in life. Most of all we are looking for spiritual meaning and purpose that can help us in the practice of living Christian lives. While philosophy may be interesting, the wisdom found in Proverbs is essentially designed for practical use.

The passage from Proverbs 31 valuing a wife as "worth above rubies" begs some questions—such as, is the wife only being valued for her productivity, and is this not rather mercenary? Are we not told to value people for who they are rather than what they can do for us? Or are we trying to take comments from one society and apply them indiscriminately to another society? We see here how the Bible speaks across cultures, but needs to be understood with its immediate cultural context in mind. As we seek to speak with wise words, and as we accept Scripture as providing wise words, we also need to understand that it is the mind that produces the wisdom, and not the following of mottoes and formulas (for example, the way in which we repeat the Lord's Prayer, perhaps?)

When it comes down to it, our faith is based on our ideas about God and how he relates to us. This wisdom we have been speaking about this quarter is about how we translate our beliefs into practice. This is why our fundamental concepts must be correct—otherwise we will not act in ways that rightly reflect our loving Father. The term "intelligent faith" has been used to describe the process. This is the opposite of blind faith, for it requires that our trust is based on evidence. God calls us to experiment, to "taste and see" that to trust in him is the best of all possible options. The wise words we follow come from the recognition that God is indeed trustworthy, that he is our Friend, and that good is inherently good. Our words do not make it so: it is as we follow the path of right that we too identify with God that his way is the only way we would ever want to live.

Ellen White Comments

There is much wisdom with worldly men, but with all their wisdom they behold not the beauty and majesty, the justice and wisdom, the goodness and holiness, of the Creator of all worlds.... The work of Christ's disciples is to shine as lights, making manifest to the world the character of God. They are to catch the increasing rays of light from the Word of God and reflect them to men enshrouded in the darkness of misapprehension of God. The servants of Christ must rightly represent the character of God and Christ to men. {TMK 98}

The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ is an intelligent faith.... Christ would have His followers use their intellect in spiritual matters as in business transactions, conscientiously weighing evidence irrespective of results. He desires them to think deeply. {ST July 28, 1898}