

8. Words of Wisdom (1Q 2015—Proverbs)

Biblical material: Proverbs 20; 1 Cor. 12:14–26; Jer. 9:23, 24; Proverbs 21; Matt. 25:35–40; Proverbs 22.

Quotes

- A word to the wise ain't necessary—it's the stupid ones that need the advice. *Bill Cosby*
- Before God we are all equally wise—and equally foolish. *Albert Einstein*
- Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it. *Albert Einstein*
- Skillful speech not only means that we pay attention to the words we speak and to their tone but also requires that our words reflect compassion and concern for others and that they help and heal, rather than wound and destroy. *Bhante Henepola Gunaratana*
- Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you'd have preferred to talk. *Doug Larson*
- The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind. *Khalil Gibran*

Questions

How do we best present the Bible's "words of wisdom"? Is such proverbial wisdom as appropriate and relevant today as it was when it was written? Are there times when to give a proverb may be counter-productive? What are the truly *wise* words we should be sharing? While there are many wise words, what are the wisest?

Bible summary

More wise words are found in Prov. 20-22. The very first verse about wine and beer is surely right to the point, as are the other statements that invite consideration. Even children are known by their actions (20:11). If you love sleep you'll grow poor (20:13). A gossip betrays confidence (20:19). Doing what is right and just is better than sacrifice (21:3). Whoever ignores the cries of the poor you too will be ignored (21:13). Guide children early and they will continue on this path (22:6). (Is this always true?). There's much material that would form a good basis for discussion. 1 Cor. 12:14–26 speaks of the connectedness of the body as a symbol of Christian society. Jer. 9:23, 24 speaks of what we should boast about. The end-time separation of the sheep and the goats and the reasons are described in Matt. 25:35–40.

Comment

Let's consider one of the proverbs in this week's material: "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife." Proverbs 21:9 NIV. What are we to make of such a statement? (My wife suggests we should find a proverb for husbands too!) The fact that we smile at the statement suggests that some of the proverbial comments are designed to be humorous—and what does that say about God's word? For in thinking about Scripture and its revelation of God, we need to see more than mere words and gain an understanding of the truth about our heavenly Father.

The wife comment above is balanced by the “worth above rubies” section from Proverbs 31. However this also 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 mottos 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

The Lord desires His representatives to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. It is His design that the men in positions of responsibility in the world shall have an opportunity of hearing the truth. The truth has been misrepresented. False charges have been made against it. The kings and rulers of this world are to be given an opportunity of knowing and understanding the truth for themselves. They are to see the truth in contrast with error. While they are being critically examined by men who do not love or fear God, the Lord's servants will have opportunity to speak words of wisdom. "For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." {ST, July 25, 1900}

The only security for any soul is right thinking. We are to use every means that God has placed within our reach for the government and cultivation of our thoughts. We are to bring our minds into harmony with His mind. His truth will sanctify us, body and soul and spirit, and we shall be enabled to rise above temptation. The words that we speak will be wise words. {2MCP 613}

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}

You should walk by faith, not by feeling. We do not want a sensational religion; but we want a religion founded on intelligent faith. {RH April 9, 1889}

We may have an intelligent faith; we may not only say we believe, but we may in meekness and confidence be able to define what we believe, and why we believe as we do. We should exercise living faith, not a blind credulity. {ST March 31, 1890}

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