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The Book of Proverbs

I. Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord

(The first seven verses serve as an introduction to the entire book of Proverbs. Verse 1 is the title; verses 2-6 express the twofold purpose of the book of Proverbs in one extended sentence; and verse 7 gives the motto of the book.)

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A. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS (vv. 2-3)

“To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding,
To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity”
(Proverbs 1:2–3, NASB95)

1. Proverbs was written to help us attain “wisdom, instruction (discipline)” and “understanding.”

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- a. “Wisdom”
 - 1) The Hebrew word for wisdom (*hokmah*) means “skill or expertise” in an area
 - 2) Used in Exodus 28:3 to describe the skillful workers who prepared Aaron’s garments.
 - 3) Also used in Exodus 31:1-11 and 1 Kings 7:14 of those who built the tabernacle and the temple.
 - 4) Just as a person might be a skilled craftsman or musician, so might a person be skilled in living life.

5) Proverbs was written to help us gain this skill.

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b. "Instruction, Discipline"

- 1) Hebrew word, *musar*.
- 2) It means "moral discipline, instruction, or correction."
- 3) Conveys the idea of learning through discipline.
- 4) Same Hebrew word is used of . . .

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a) Chastening imparted by a parent (Proverbs 13:24; 22:15)

"He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently." (Proverbs 13:24)

"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him." (Proverbs 22:15)

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b) God's training of His covenant (Proverbs 3:11; Deuteronomy 11:2)

"My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof" (Proverbs 3:11)

"Know this day that I am not speaking with your sons who have not known and who have not seen the discipline of the Lord your God—His greatness, His mighty hand and His outstretched arm" (Deuteronomy 11:2).

4) Though we may have gained the knowledge for skillful living, we still need the personal discipline to do so.

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c. "Understanding, Insight"

- 1) From the Hebrew word *binah*.
 - 2) The ability to comprehend.
 - 3) The power to make our experiences intelligible.
 - ☐ The purpose of Proverbs is to help us gain skill for living, the discipline to carry through with it, and the discernment to know whether or not we are "on course."
2. Wisdom offered to us in Proverbs is skill for living
 - a. Not merely intellectual or academic — primarily moral.
 - b. In Proverbs we learn how to live in every area of our lives (e.g., family, finances, friendships, speech, work, etc.)
 - c. Wisdom's goal is to help us . . .
 - 1) Live a life of beauty and significance.
 - 2) Reach the end of our lives having accomplished something worthwhile and lasting.
3. Wisdom's source
 - a) We are not born with wisdom
 - b) We do not automatically become wise as you grow older
 - c) Wisdom comes from God

Slide 8**B. FURTHER BENEFITS OF WISDOM**

"To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity;"
(Proverbs 1:3, NASB95)

1. You will "receive instruction in wise behavior" (3a)
 - a. You will learn to act wisely in real-life situations, instead of stumbling through life like a bull in a china shop, always saying and doing the wrong things.
 - b. Hebrew word translated 'wise behavior' is used of Abigail (1 Samuel

25:3).

“And the woman was intelligent (NASB95), discerning (ESV), good understanding (NKJV)”

- 1) She dealt prudently with the threat posed to her household because of the folly of her husband Nabal (1 Samuel 25).
- 2) Studying Proverbs will make us less like Nabal (Proverbs 19:11) and more like Abigail.

“A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.” (Proverbs 19:11, NASB95)

2. You will learn “righteousness, justice and equity” (3b)
 - a. “Righteousness” — conformity to God’s standard.
 - 1) Hebrew word (*sedeq*) used in Deuteronomy 25:13-15
 - 2) Refers to not having two sets of weights in your bag enabling you to cheat your neighbor by short-changing him or her when you sell and take too much when you buy.
 - b. “Justice and equity” — exercised by one who makes fair decisions.

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C. WHO BENEFITS FROM WISDOM

“To give prudence to the naive,
To the youth knowledge and discretion,
A wise man will hear and increase in learning,
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,”
(Proverbs 1:4–5, NASB95)

1. The Naive (Simple)
 - a. This does not refer to someone who is intellectually limited but a

person who is untaught.

- b. He or she is inexperienced in life because they haven't lived long enough to develop wisdom.
- c. They are gullible.

"The naive believes everything,
But the sensible man considers his steps."

(Proverbs 14:15, NASB95)

- d. Though our culture praises open-mindedness, it is not good to be open-minded when it comes to evil and error.

2. The Young

- a. This is the person who is beginning to enter the adult world.
- b. He or she hasn't had the range of life experiences or the physical and mental maturity to develop wisdom.
- c. Typically, the young tend to live only for the moment. They do not plan for the future.
- d. Not only do they need "knowledge" as to how the world works, but "discretion" — good judgment, the ability to make responsible decisions.

"For wisdom will enter your heart
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
Discretion will guard you,
Understanding will watch over you,"

(Proverbs 2:10–11, NASB95)

3. Those already wise (5)

- a) "A wise man will hear and increase in learning"
 - 1) Those who are truly wise remain teachable.
 - 2) They 'increase in learning' through continued disciplined study.

- b) “A man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.”
 - 1) The Hebrew word translated ‘wise counsel’ (*tahbulot*) was often used in nautical terminology of the ropes used to steer (guide) a ship.
 - 2) Proverbs warns against the counsel of fools and against following your own feelings — “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).
 - 3) The guidance offered by Proverbs is firmly grounded in truth and righteousness.
 - 4) We do not gain wisdom merely by being ‘zapped’ from above; rather, wisdom for living comes through the disciplined study of God’s Word, so that we establish a pattern of wise choices in life.

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D. WISDOM IMPARTS MENTAL DISCERNMENT (vv. 2b, 6)

“To discern the sayings of understanding”
(Proverbs 1:2b, NASB95)

“To understand a proverb and a figure,
The words of the wise and their riddles.”
(Proverbs 1:6, NASB95)

- 1. It provides us insight into reality.
 - a. The word translated “discern” (2a) and “understand” (6a) means ‘to distinguish between two things.’

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- b. Solomon prayed, “So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil” (1 Kings 3:9a).
- c. Hebrews 5:14 speaks of the mature ‘who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.’

- d. Discernment helps decide upon which teachers we are to embrace and which ones we must avoid because of their unbiblical doctrine.
- e. Discernment helps us distinguish between what is true and false, what is right and wrong in culture (e.g., movies, television, education, etc.).

Slide 12**2. It helps us better understand God's Word**

- a. To the natural man, the Bible itself is foolishness (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” (1 Corinthians 2:14, NASB95)

- b. With the help of the Holy Spirit, your disciplined study of Proverbs will help you develop important skill in understanding the wisdom contained in God's Word.

Slide 13**3. We better understand the figures of speech in Proverbs**

- a. The book of Proverbs contains a number of literary devices — “a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles” (1:6).
- b. There are parables, aphorisms (a concise witty remark which contains a general truth), and sayings.
- c. Some of the proverbs use humor— “The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, but will not even bring it back to his mouth” (19:25).
- d. Many of the Proverbs employ parallelism, sometimes synonymous (restating the same point) and at other times antithetical (making a contrast).

Slide 13**Synonymous Parallelism:**

“In the way of righteousness is life,
And in its pathway there is no death.”

(Proverbs 12:28, NASB95)

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler,
And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.”

(Proverbs 20:1, NASB95)

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Antithetical Parallelism:

“A wise son makes a father glad,
But a foolish son is a grief to his mother.”

(Proverbs 10:1, NASB95)

“A gentle answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger.”

(Proverbs 15:1, NASB95)

- e. You must read carefully or you will make errors in interpretation.
- 4. Studying the book of Proverbs will sharpen your mind
 - a. While many of you have already read the Proverbs and appreciate the practical wisdom offered there, I want to challenge you to go deeper so that you will better understand the value of wisdom and how it is attained.
 - b. The book of Proverbs offers you an education unsurpassed by any institution of higher learning.
 - c. Through disciplined study we will learn both how to think and how to live well.

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E. THE FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT PIECE OF INSTRUCTION

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

(Proverbs 1:7, NASB95)

1. The beginning point for us becoming wise people is ‘the fear of the Lord’
 - a. The phrase “the fear of the Lord” occurs 14 times in Proverbs (1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17).
 - b. The phrase “fear the Lord” occurs four times (3:7; 14:2; 24:21; 31:30)
2. It doesn’t mean being frightened of Him, but revering Him, honoring Him, giving Him the proper place in our lives.

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3. He is the source of all true knowledge and wisdom.
 - a. Wisdom is an attribute of God — “With Him are wisdom and might; to Him belong counsel and understanding” (Job 12:13).
 - b. His wisdom is displayed in His works — “It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens” (Jeremiah 10:12).
 - c. Wisdom is imparted to men through God’s Word — “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7).

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4. God imparts wisdom to those who seek Him.
 - a. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).
 - b. The early chapters of Proverbs plead with the naive reader to earnestly pursue wisdom.

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5. The fear of God leads to wise and pure living.

“The fear of the Lord leads to life” (Proverbs 19:23a).

“By the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil” (Proverbs 16:6b).

6. You cannot discern the true nature of life and the world apart from the Lord who is the root of all knowledge.
 - a. The one who tries to be wise apart from God is a branch cut off from the root.
 - b. Only the godly are truly wise.
7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom in the same way in which a foundation is the beginning of a house.

Slide 19**D. WE MUST AVOID BEING A FOOL (7B)**

“Fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7b, NASB95)

1. Foolishness is not merely a mental defect.
2. It is a moral deficiency which leads to all kinds of disasters and sins in life.
3. Fools lack sense, and they lack the sense to know they lack sense.
4. Solomon tells us that “fools despise wisdom and instruction.”
 - a. To “despise” means “to hold in contempt, to belittle, to ridicule.”
 - b. If we hold God in contempt, if we belittle Him, we will never become wise.
 - c. Instead, we will live our lives in violation of His will, which will bring us constant trouble in life.

Conclusion

1. Max Anders in his commentary on Proverbs wrote,

“A person cannot break the laws of God. He can only break himself when he violates them.”
2. We live in a world in which many think they can break God’s laws for His world and still succeed in life.

- a. Those who believe they will be winners in life if they accumulate enough of fame, fortune and pleasure.
 - b. Students who are gaining knowledge but not life skills.
 - c. Young people who are being taught to acquire things and enjoy pleasures, but not to fear the Lord.
 - d. It is essential that our youth learn to pursue godly wisdom. It is the only thing which will truly sustain them in this world.
3. Let's make it our goal as God's people not only to learn and apply God's wisdom in our lives, but to instill it into our youth as well.
 4. May God bless us in our quest.