

THE FEAR OF THE LORD -- WHAT IS IT?

Proverbs 9:10

Intro: Those of us who have been doing the memory work this year have spent a lot of time in the book of Proverbs. Memorizing the verses has not been easy, but I hope you agree with me when I say that it has been profitable. Solomon had a way of putting his finger on the basic issues of a godly life, but, of course, this ability was given to him by God.

We can really consider that the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and even the Song of Solomon were God's answer to Solomon's prayer when he first became King of Israel, succeeding his father, King David. God appeared to Solomon in a dream one night and said this to him: "Ask what I shall give thee" (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon's response was:

Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people (1 King 3:9)?

And then we have God's response to Solomon in the following verses:

11 And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

13 And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

14 And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days (1 King 3:11-14).

Now all of this did not mean that Solomon immediately had all of the wisdom we find in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, nor does it mean that Solomon never did anything foolish. We know that his life ended in the tragic marriages he had with foreign women who enticed him into servicing heathen gods. No, Solomon was not perfect. But with his prayer he entered into a life-long relationship with his God in which he was constantly growing in knowledge and the ability to use

that knowledge---which is wisdom.

If our Lord in His life on earth "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2:52), then we can be sure that wisdom was not handed out by God to Solomon all at once. God gave him wisdom as he needed it, and we have the evidence of what the Lord taught him in these three books, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

I. THE MEANING OF WISDOM IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

I am going through all of this to point out one very important fact about the wisdom which God gave to Solomon. We can be sure that what Solomon had in mind, and what God gave him, was divine wisdom, the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of men. And we need to keep this in mind when we read a book like the Proverbs of Solomon, and especially, for example, two verses which we have learned: Proverbs 4:7, 8:

7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.

"The principal thing" means not only the most important thing in a person's life, but it is the place to start, and the place to continue. It deserves the best of your time, and the most of your time. In short, there must not be anything in a person's life which in any way competes with the acquiring of the wisdom of God.

Perhaps you haven't read what Solomon said right after these verses in Proverbs 4. Let me read them to you: Prov. 4:9-14:

9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.

10 Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many.

11 I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.

12 When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.

13 Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.

And then he added by way of contrast:

14 Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.

We can easily see from the circumstances under which God gave

wisdom to Solomon, that it was not only divine wisdom, but it was wisdom which is to be put into practice in our lives. The book applied first of all to Solomon's son, but it is a book for all of us who know the Lord, a book we cannot afford to ignore.

You remember how Solomon explained in this book that to get wisdom is better than getting silver and gold. Do you remember the verses we memorized which said this? Cf. Prov. 3:13-17:

13 Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

So Solomon was not encouraging his son to get a college or university degree--although if pursued with caution there is not necessarily anything wrong with that. He was encouraging his son to seek out the truth of God, and to continue that search as long as he lived. This is what he meant by the words, "Get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."

How does this apply to us?

It means just exactly what Solomon wanted it to mean to his son. All of us need to realize that the most important thing that we have to do is to get acquainted with our Bibles. There is no better way for us to start teaching our children than to get them into the Word. It is to be a growing knowledge for all of us. We will never learn it all, but we are to keep learning the Word of God as long as we live. And we must remember that these truths were revealed to Solomon in answer to prayer, and we need to ask the Lord to help us to know and understand and wisely apply to our lives what we find, not only in this book, but in all of Scripture. There is nothing that is more important for any one of us. We need to be reading it ourselves. If we have children, we need to be teaching it to them. We need to meditate on it. We need to memorize it. We need to talk about it. "Wisdom is the principal thing." Our Bibles must come first, and always be first. Don't let your business, or your school work, or your pleasures take all of your time. Make sure that your Bible

has the greatest priority in your life. God would not have given us His Word if it were not extremely important for us to know it. So, in the words of Solomon, "Get it."

But now let me point out from this book of Proverbs that the study of Scripture is different from the study of any other book you have, or any other book that you will ever study. It is because of this that A. W. Pink did not like to talk about studying the Bible. He felt it put the acquiring of knowledge on the same plane as what we do when we study other subjects. Personally I don't mind talking about Bible study but we have to realize that there is a difference. You can study the Bible like you would history or some other kind of literature, but if you do, you will not get the profit out of it that God wants you to have.

So let us ask about:

II. HOW DO WE LEARN THE WISDOM OF GOD?

How do we get started in learning the truth of God? And along with that we should ask, How should we continue?

Solomon told his son in the first chapter of this book, and then he re-stated it in a slightly different way in the text I have chosen for tonight: Prov. 9:10. But first let us look at Proverbs 1:7 (the first part of the verse).

What does it say? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

The word "beginning" in this verse is the same word in the Hebrew as the word "principal" in Prov. 4:7. It means that this is the place to start, and this is the place to continue. Where? With "the fear of the Lord." And this is what Prov. 9:10 says also. The words for "beginning" are different, but the idea is the same. If a person wants to learn the truth of the Word of God, he or she must not only know what it means to fear the Lord, but he or she must actually fear Him.

Now let us go back to Solomon's prayer for wisdom to judge the people of Israel. Why did he pray that prayer? I think you can say that it was for one reason: It was because he wanted to please the Lord. He certainly held the Lord in high esteem, and if we can say that he feared the Lord (and we can), we mean that he feared doing anything that would displease the Lord.

Charles Bridges said in his excellent commentary on the book of Proverbs,

The child of God has only one dread--to offend his Father; only one desire--to please and delight in him. Thus is the fear of the Lord connected with his love (p. 87).

- Obviously we can't love the Lord, and won't love the Lord, unless we know Him. So Solomon was addressing his son as one who knew the Lord. And Solomon was saying that the key to understanding the Word of God is that we fear Him, not in the sense that we dread Him or that we dread to think of how He might want us to live, but that we love Him, we want to please Him, we do not want to grieve Him, and we want to learn more and more about Him.

After all isn't the greatest commandment in the Word of God, Old or New, that we should love the Lord our God with all of our heart and soul and strength and mind? This is what it means to fear Him. And so we can please Him, we want to know Him in His Word. To know the Lord as "the Holy" One, and to desire to do His will because we love Him, is the key which unlocks the priceless treasures of Scripture for us.

- The fear of the Lord is where we need to start, and this is the way we must continue. This is how we start learning the truths of Scripture, and how we are to continue. If the gaining of wisdom is to have the highest priority in our lives, then so must the fear of the Lord.

Do you see what Solomon was saying? We must never forget whose book this is. We must in our desire to know the knowledge of the truth and the wisdom of God, always be motivated by a desire to know Him. Then obedience to the Word brings great joy to the heart of God because He knows that our desire to know the Word is motivated by our desire to know and please Him.

- Concl: This morning in my class we were considering the Atonement of Christ, the salvation which He provided for us when He died for sinners on the Cross. And as we discussed it together I think that we all could see that the reason that we all have had trouble believing in Particular Redemption, that Christ died to guarantee the salvation of those whom the Father has chosen, is because we have known so little about God--His attributes: His wisdom, His power, His right to do what He pleases, His grace, and so on. When we want to know Him, and we really love Him, and want to please Him, then He opens the truth to us more and more, and our love for Him continues to grow.

I believe the present generation has lost a great deal which we need to learn from men and women of God in the past. We

are so taken up with degrees and scholarship that we don't feel a person is qualified to teach our young people even in our Christian schools unless they have a lot of degrees after their names. But it is not necessarily true that just because a Christian has some advanced degree that he really knows the Lord and is walking with the Lord. Perhaps it would be good that every application for a faculty member would be preceded by the question, "Do you fear the Lord?" Do you really love Him? Is the main desire of your life to please Him? Do you hate sin because He hates sin? Do you want to know Him better and to enrich your fellowship with Him?

I have had the privilege during my life of sitting at the feet of some very dear servants of the Lord. For the most part they weren't men who got their training in the schools; they got their training on their knees. There are godly men who have come out of our schools, but that is not where they have learned godliness. But when they started to teach, you knew that they were well acquainted with the Person they were talking about. And it was like being on the outskirts of heaven.

May the Lord bring us back to the starting point, and keep that spirit in our hearts as long as we live. The Apostle Paul was a man who feared God, and while writing from a Roman prison he gave testimony to the way his heart was taken up with his Lord. Listen to what he wrote. You know the words so well, but may the Lord make them our words:

- 10 **That I may know him**, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;
- 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.
- 12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.
- 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,
- 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

This is what we need, and this is what our generation needs-- people whose chief desire in life is to know and love the Lord, and to live lives that are pleasing to Him. There is no way to tell how the Lord might see fit to bless and use us if this were our main purpose in life. I want it to be mine, and I hope you want it to be yours.