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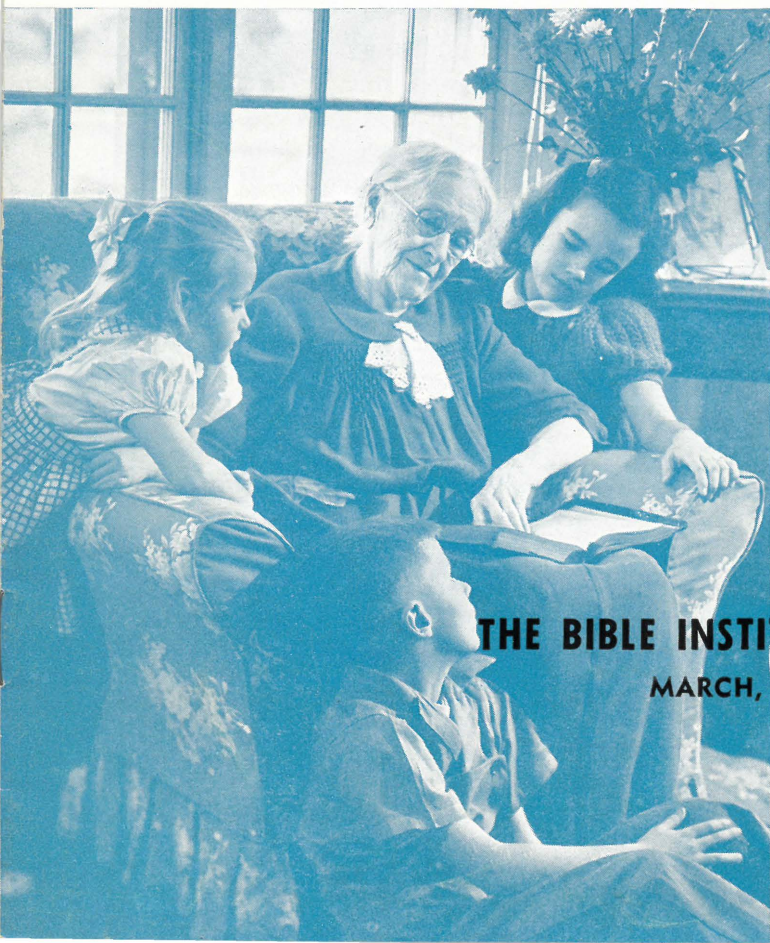
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THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

Studies in PROVERBS

by CHESTER J. PADGETT, D.D.



as
given
on

THE BIBLE INSTITUTE HOUR

MARCH, 1957

PREFACE

The material in this little booklet, the first of a series of booklets on the fascinating book of Proverbs, was given over the Bible Institute Hour on the Don Lee Mutual Network during the month of March, 1947. It is presented to our radio listeners with the prayer that it may bring spiritual blessing to all who read and study its content.

The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, Inc.

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THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

(Prov. 1:1-7)

Today we begin a study of the book of Proverbs in the Bible. We will not take up a verse-by-verse study, although the temptation to do so is strong, but rather will lift out of the book certain portions that have a special bearing on the Christian life of today, and will seek to apply these as the Lord gives insight into His Word.

The first paragraph of Proverbs sets the stage, as it were, for all that follows. The book deals with the wisdom of God, and in order to understand the book, one must first of all know the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour. The Lord Jesus is called the "wisdom" of God (I Cor. 1:30.) He spoke of Himself as *the Truth* (John 14:6.) Thus the very beginning of spiritual wisdom is to know Christ. Dear friend, do *you* know Him?

As I have studied this book of Proverbs I have been impressed with two truths: first, *the exceedingly practical character* of the book. This book demonstrates how God expects His child to live and think. Dr. Zookler, in Lange's commentary says, "The Proverbs present the principal documentary source of the ethics of the Old Testament." Luther said in the Introduction to his work on Proverbs that the book ". . . may be rightly called a book of good works; for Solomon there teaches the nature of a godly and useful life, — so that every man aiming at godliness should make it his daily Handbook or Book of Devotion, and often read in it and compare with it his life."

Dr. M. Stuart said, "All the heathen moralists and proverbialists joined together cannot furnish us with one such as that of Proverbs." And again, "After all the light which Christianity has shed upon us, we could not part with this book without severe loss." Dr. Bridges said, "While other parts of Scripture show the glory of our high calling, this may instruct us in all minuteness of detail how to 'walk worthy of it.'" Elsewhere we learn our completeness in

Christ (Col. 2:10); and most justly we glory in our high exaltation as 'joint heirs with Christ' (Rom. 8:17). We look into this book [Proverbs], and, as by the aid of the microscope, we see that minuteness of our Christian obligation; that there is not a temper, a look, a word, a movement, the most important action of the day, the smallest relative duty, in which we do not either deface or adorn the image of our Lord, and the profession of His Name."

The second impression that comes to me as I study Proverbs is this — I marvel at the wisdom of God as contrasted with the paltry products of man's reason at its very best. Man's wisdom is partial; God's is complete. There are no less than 38 distinct themes dealt with in Proverbs, each of utmost importance as related to man's conduct and happiness. Among these themes are: Separation, Stewardship, Submission to the Word, Spiritual Insight, Sin, Sanctity, Industry, Speech, Pride, Humility, The Home, Prayer, Temper, etc., etc.

Now, in the opening seven verses of Proverbs we learn the following about the book: 1) the author, 2) the form of writing, 3) the purpose of the book, 4) the intended recipients, 5) the key that alone will unlock the treasures of God's wisdom.

THE AUTHOR

(v. 1)

Solomon, the son of David, is the author of Proverbs. From this fact we may learn many valuable lessons. What a trophy of divine grace is this man! You are familiar with his background. You know that his mother was married to his father amidst tragic circumstances. David committed adultery with Solomon's mother and was instrumental not only in robbing this woman of her purity, but also of robbing her of her lawful husband whom he saw to it was killed in battle. Yet God, in His love and grace and patience, over-ruled these sins to bring into the world the wisest man it has ever known apart from God's own Son!

Solomon also teaches us the blessing of a spiritual heritage. Although David had sinned, yet his heart was, in the main, in tune with God, and God could say of him that he was "a man after His own heart." David gave his son Solomon the benefit of a spiritual heritage; from his father he came to know the Lord and to love the Word of God and the people of God. How fortunate are young people so favored!

But Solomon stands, not only as an encouragement to us, but also as a warning. His life encourages us to seek God early; it also warns us to keep God ever first in our lives or we may end as Solomon did, a spiritual casualty.

THE FORM OF WRITING

(v. 1)

The first verse speaks of "proverbs." Why does God give us this form of literature in His holy Word? For several reasons: for one thing such writing creates and sustains interest. Proverbs are mind-gripping. The truth sticks. God uses every method in winning precious souls to His Son. He leaves no stone unturned in persuading sinners to Christ. Again, proverbs make a lasting impression on the mind and heart. They are easy to memorize and easy to quote. They constitute sermons in a nut-shell.

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

(1:2-4)

We note four things here: first, the Holy Spirit inspired Proverbs in order to enable men to be truly educated (v. 2a). No man is really educated who does not know the Lord and walk in the light of His Word. Sin has made fools of men (Rom. 1:19-28.) Sin has impaired man's mind (I Cor. 2:14.) But God restores man's ability to understand spiritual things and gives him true wisdom, the wisdom that is from above.

The second of Proverbs is to give a right sense of values

— “to perceive the words of understanding” (v. 2b.) Every man needs the mind of God in the realm of morals and in the realm of theology. Only God can tell a man how rightly to live and how rightly to think.

The third purpose of Proverbs is to indicate the proper relationship between the child of God and all men (v. 3.) The word “justice” means righteous dealing; the word “judgments” means fair-play; the word “equity” means sincerity.

The fourth purpose of Proverbs is to give the ability to escape from the wiles of the devil (v. 4.) This means the impartation of ability to slip out of Satan’s grasp. The Word of God gives man the subtlety to evade the devil, and what a help this is!

THE RECIPIENTS OF PROVERBS

(vv. 4-5)

These verses speak of two classes of people, the young and inexperienced, and the older and more experienced. How young people need the Word of God in these days! How important it is for them to be thoroughly grounded in the Word of God if they are to live victoriously for Christ in these perilous times! The devil’s lies are almost impossible to detect until too late. Only the Word of God unveils his wiles. The Bible alone can give soberness, the sense of reality, right values, caution, and a fear of doing wrong. These things are meant by the words “knowledge and discretion.”

Older believers need the Bible, too. Even mature Christians need to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. No believer ever gets to the place where he knows it all (Phil. 3:10-14.) The wiser a man gets in spiritual things the more God opens his eyes to learn (Psa. 25:14.) Mature Christians are men and women the Lord can use to “counsel” and to “interpret” the Word to others (v. 6.)

THE KEY TO PROVERBS

(v. 7)

What is meant by the phrase “the fear of the Lord”? This statement means *the acknowledgement of God* (Heb. 11:6.) No man can fear the Lord if he does not believe that God exists. To fear God is to confess that He is and that He is observing men’s actions, and that He must call each man to give full accounting of his life.

The “fear of the Lord” means an admission of personal responsibility to God. If God is the Creator and Saviour of men, then every man is responsible to God to obey Him, love Him, serve Him. This word is a confession of the truth that each life is a stewardship and that the Judgment Seat of Christ is a reality (II Cor. 5:10.)

The “fear of the Lord” means a holy reverence and respect for God that powerfully influences the life for holiness. The term means that the believer is afraid of God in the sense that he knows every sin will receive the judgment of God, and that he will feel the weight of the Father’s chastening hand.

Now do you see why the “fear of the Lord” is the *beginning* of wisdom, and why it is that no man can fully understand the Word of God without it? You see, all true wisdom is from God; all true wisdom recognizes the Person and the Priority of God; all true wisdom is spiritual insight; and all true wisdom leads to the glory of God — which is the “chief end of man.”

TOO LATE

(Prov. 1:8-33)

This is an important section of the book of Proverbs, and especially so for young people. Verses 8-9 indicate the wisdom on the part of young people in heeding their parents. Oftentimes a young man or woman thinks his parents do not really have his or her best interests at heart, and that

they require things not really necessary or important. In the long run, however, boys and girls learn that Mom and Dad were right after all, but sometimes they learn this lesson too late! How important it is for a young person to learn obedience to authority and along with obedience respect! How much delinquency would have been avoided if the child now a criminal had learned self-discipline and respect for lawful authority.

Another truth in this section is found in vv. 10-19. Here we learn the wisdom of turning a deaf ear to the enticements of Satan. We live in difficult days. These are indeed "perilous times." Satanic influence is becoming more and more pronounced as the end of the age draws near. The conscience of man is being systematically calloused and his brain is being carefully and patiently "washed" of Biblical truth and in its place is being planted the materialistic philosophies of the times.

But the main truth to me in this section is contained in vv. 20-33. Here is the impassioned cry of wisdom to every man to hear, heed and obey the Word of God. As I have already pointed out a synonym for "wisdom" in Proverbs is Christ, or Truth. We have then, Christ calling to all men everywhere to hear and live.

Note that this is a *recognizable call* (vv. 20-21.) It is *widespread*. All the world is guilty before God (Rom. 3:19.) In His grace God makes His gracious invitation available to all. He speaks in nature (Psalm 19:1-6); He speaks in the conscience of men (Rom. 2:14-15); He speaks through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:18.) God has not spared any effort to call the attention of man to his sin and God's salvation. This call is *impassioned* — "wisdom . . . uttereth her voice. . . ." God is calling earnestly, tenderly, pleadingly for every sinner to come Home.

Note the way wisdom *remonstrates* with men (vv. 22-23.) There are three classes of people mentioned here: 1) *simple ones* — people not far along in the ways of evil, but on the way! They love simple and foolish things; they

have no serious thoughts; they love to be entertained rather than educated! 2) Wisdom speaks to *scorners* (v. 22.) These are men who see nothing in Christ or in the Gospel (Isa. 53.) Such men mock the love of God and spurn His offer of salvation (I Cor. 1:18ff.3) Wisdom speaks to fools (v. 22.) A fool is a man who hates knowledge. He vehemently opposes the truth to his own destruction. Only a fool would do this! But God lovingly speaks to such men, yea, pleads with them not to persist in the road that leads to Hell. The reproof of God is intended only to lead men to repentance and everlasting life — to turn men to Christ and from their sin. God stands ever ready to bless (v. 23.) He will pour out the Spirit upon any earnest seeking heart; He will reveal His truth to every honest heart.

Observe the *retaliation of wisdom* (vv. 24-32.) God must and does judge sin, not in any peevish, vindictive, vengeful spirit, but according to the justice of His nature and of His law. These verses teach the responsibility of each man for the state of his soul (vv. 24-25.) No sinner can blame God if he goes to hell, nor if he suffers the consequences of his actions in this life. It is an inescapable law of God that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7.) These verses teach that there is a "land of no return" — a time when the soul is forever confirmed in sin — a place where there can never be another chance for repentance and salvation (vv. 26-32.)

In the last place, note in v. 33, *the reward* for heeding the call of wisdom. The text speaks of *dwelling safely!* How blessed to have a refuge from the storms of life, and ultimately from the storm of God's righteous wrath against sin. How blessed to be safely tucked away in Jesus so that the flames of Hell can never burn and scorch! How wonderful to be safely beyond the reach of Satan forever, as is every trusting soul (John 10:28-29.) The text also speaks of *quietness from the fear of evil*. How good to have a quiet soul! Read Psalm 131 in this connection. Security is a birthright of the believer.

“I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
Are the glorified spirits in Heaven!”

SWEETER AS THE YEARS GO BY
(Prov. 4:18)

The next text in Proverbs to which I call your attention is 4:18. This is one of the most wonderful verses in the entire Bible! If you are in the habit of underlining verses in your Bible I trust that this one is already underlined, if not, do it now. I underlined this verse in my Bible back in 1938 when a student at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. I was on my knees working through Proverbs and the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart in this verse. I intended to preach from this text some day but did not do so until Sunday evening, May 29, 1955, in Calvary Church, Placentia, where it is my privilege to pastor. But during the years the truth of the text was incubating in my heart and mind, and after walking with Christ for 21 years, I was ready to preach this truth — that the Christian experience *does* get sweeter as the years go by!

Will you notice that this text presents a philosophy exactly opposite to that of the world! The world says, “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!” As a man of the world gets older he feels that his enjoyments are passing away. Not so with the Christian. The older a believer gets more like Christ he becomes, and the nearer he gets to that blessed moment when the Saviour shall return and every saint will be transformed into His image (I John 3:1-3.)

This is indeed a precious text to young people because it encourages them to launch out on a life that gets better and better. No young man or woman who trusts the Saviour and yields his life to Christ will ever regret it. He has launched out on the most thrilling adventure possible. This is a comforting text for those “in the midst of the years.”

Middle-age may be the time of disillusionment and monotony. But it ought not so to be for the child of God. The believer has reached the mid-way mark, and the future is rosier for him than at any time in spiritual attainments and service. This is a good text for old age. The old man of the world has to look back and feed on memories; the child of God looks to the future, to meeting God, to seeing Christ and rejoining the saints who have gone on before him. Yes, it is glorious to be a Christian; it is sad to be an unbeliever!

There are several preliminary observations we ought to make before dealing with the teaching of the text. One of these is this: life presents two ways to travel, in effect, the “high way,” and the “low way.” Our Lord puts it thus: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:13-14.) Study Psalm 1 in this connection.

The text tells us that the path of *the just* is as the shining light. Now, who are the just? They are those who are justified by faith and thus are listed as the children of God (Rom. 5:1.) There is no other way to become numbered with “the just” than this (II Cor. 5:21.) The justified man will want to walk with God; he will long for and aspire to a holy life, and hence will have fellowship with the Lord along the “paths of righteousness” (Psalm 23.) We are told that the path of the just is as a “shining light.” This means illumination — God does not let His child walk alone in the dark (John 8:12.) The Word of God sheds its brilliant gleam on the road (Psa. 119:105.) The word “shining” speaks of beauty. The path of the Christian is the most beautiful highway in the world and leads straight to the throne of God!

FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST GETS SWEETER

We learn to love through association. The more you are with a person you love, the more you come to love him. This is doubly so of the Lord Jesus Christ. To know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to want to know Him better. This was Paul's experience (Phil. 3:10.) It is the experience of each believer. Time reveals the intrinsic beauty of the Saviour's character; time puts His friendship to the test and proves it to be real.

THE SACRED WORD GETS SWEETER

Love letters are always thrilling, especially when they come from God! The Bible is His love letter to every beloved Christian. Lovers pore over their love letters — they read them and re-read them until they have them memorized. So the Christian and his Bible (Psalm 119:11.) The believer learns to interpret every event and circumstance of his life in the light of the Word of God. In this way the Bible becomes the Christian's guide, his staff and stay, his comfort his encouragement along the way.

At morn I chose a little verse,
It scarce took up a line
In God's Big Book, yet 'twas a gem
From His eternal mind.

At noon a cutting sorrow came,
And through that dreadful hour,
I held my gem, quite steadily
Against its grinding power.

At eve I pondered on that verse
The while I sat alone,
And lo! imprisoned beauties burst,
From out the perfect stone.

—Alice Hoffman

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SAINTS GETS SWEETER

The great Apostle wrote, "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." (Heb. 10:25.) If ever the believer needed the help and inspiration and encouragement of God's people it is in these last days.

Let us remember, too, that the Lord Jesus promised special blessing to those who were assembled in His Name (Matt. 18:29.) List the tremendously important blessings Thomas missed on that first Easter Sunday because he was not in fellowship with the other disciples (John 20:19-29.) God has so planned it that the mutual sharing of faith increases that faith.

The fellowship of the saints is important because of the bond of friendship it creates. One of the most beautiful relationships of life is the spiritual oneness of God's people. A man walked into a jewelry shop to buy a ring; the salesman showed him some of the beautiful stones in the showcase and then the eye of the customer happened to light on a rather ugly stone set to one side.

"That isn't a very beautiful stone, is it?" he asked.

Without answering, the man picked up the stone and held it tightly in the hollow of his hand for a moment; then, relinquishing his grasp, he held the stone out for observation, and it sparkled and glittered with the radiance of a hundred diamonds.

"What did you do to it?" asked the bewildered buyer.

"This stone is an opal; we call it the sympathetic jewel; it only needs to be gripped by the hand to bring out its wonderful beauty."

Dear friend, this is true of many Christians, too. All they need to do is to be loved and appreciated and the beauty of Christ will shine out of their lives.

THE HOPE OF THE SECOND COMING
GETS SWEETER

The passing of the years have a way of making the return of our Lord more precious in the thinking of the child of God. Loved ones and friends have gone on before and are waiting on the other shore — they tug at our hearts. The Saviour has become more precious over the years and the soul longs to see Him even as He is. The vicissitudes of life have taken their toll and the flesh cries out for the living God and for the fresh power of the resurrection body.

As the years come and go and history moves to meet the coming King, the Spirit teaches us that this life is but a preparation, a proving ground, a place of discipline fitting us for our real service in the coming age (Matt. 25:14-30.)

Yet a little, such a little, little while,
And the Coming One will come for Whom we wait.
Though He tarry, He is coming as He said,
And He will not wait too long nor come too late.

Yet a little, such a little, little while,
And we'll cease to sin or suffer here below;
Pain and sickness, death and sorrow pass away,
Never more a doubt, or fear, or grief to know.

Just a little, such a little, little while,
And we'll meet again our loved ones gone before;
Just a little, such a little, little while,
And we'll see and be with Jesus evermore.

Just a little, such a little, little while,
And oppression, crime, and selfishness shall cease;
All the wrongs of earth be righted at the last,
And this earth become a heaven of love and peace.

Though our hearts are often weary as we wait,
Still we know that Day of Days is drawing near;
Just a little, such a little, little while,
And our loved and longed-for Bridegroom shall be
here.
—A. B. Simpson

“Give the Winds a Mighty Voice!”

Pray- FOR THE THOUSANDS TUNING IN WHO DO NOT KNOW THE LORD AS THEIR PERSONAL SAVIOUR. MANY DO NOT ATTEND A CHURCH WHERE THE WORD OF GOD IS CLEARLY PROCLAIMED. PRAY FOR THE MANY SPIRITUAL BURDENS OF HUNGRY, NEEDY HEARTS AND LIVES.

Give- EVERY SINGLE DOLLAR INVESTED FOR CHRIST WILL BE USED TO REACH MORE THAN SIX THOUSAND PEOPLE. GIVE REGULARLY, MONTH BY MONTH. HELP TO MEET THE HEAVY FINANCIAL BURDENS IN THE PURCHASE OF COSTLY RADIO TIME.

Tell- REMIND FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES OF THE PROGRAMS. LET THE BROADCASTS BE MISSIONARIES IN YOUR OWN NEIGHBORHOOD.

*Help keep us on the air . . .
until Christ comes in the air!*

* * *

MONDAY, WEDNESDAY AND FRIDAY MORNINGS
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