

To Know Wisdom

"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity"—Prov. 1:2.

That is the preamble. That outlines the purpose of the book. Then he lays his foundation—the basis of all wisdom (v.7),

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"—any learning or activity that does not include, or is not based upon, the fear of the Lord is foolishness, ignorance, lack of knowledge. Any accumulation of knowledge that is not founded on the fear of the Lord is like putting new wine into old bottles—in a very short time the vessel perishes and the knowledge is lost and the effort is wasted and the laborer is shown to be a short-sighted fool. It is like building an imposing edifice on the sand.

And it is foolishness because it is being done when something infinitely more important should be done. Worldly knowledge is not always of itself foolishness, but the pursuit of it is, because it has no ultimate value to the pursuer, while a similar expenditure of time and effort in the right direction will bring eternal life.

We haven't begun to build anything permanent or valuable until we acknowledge the fear of the Lord, and our position in relation to Him.

"Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Ecc. 12:1).

That is, remember Him now in the day of opportunity. Realize the folly of earthly pursuits before decrepit impotence and failing powers of old age force upon you the realization of opportunities for ever lost.

Of those who scorn wisdom and pursue evil, Solomon says (v.18):

"They lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives."

Little do they realize this deep and fundamental truth, but it is undeniably so. Everything we do is really done to, or for, ourselves. In the ultimate, we ourselves are the recipients.

"If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it" (Prov. 9:12).

We determine our own judgment. Solomon says later (Prov. 26:27):

"He that diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him."

And Jesus confirms this divine law of retribution (Matt. 7:2)—

"With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

If we mete out mercy and love, we are meting it to ourselves. If we mete out selfishness and severity, that too is to ourselves.

All will come back, like bread upon the waters. All will return either to bless or curse us,

though we may have long forgotten it:

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Therefore, concludes Solomon (Eccl. 7:25 RV)—

"Wickedness is folly, and foolishness is madness."

Wickedness is folly because a course contrary to divine law is self-destruction. We cannot mock God. We either accept His love or we receive His anger. Selfwill is suicide. Solomon in the second chapter likens the desires of the flesh to the appeals of a strange woman enticing the simple to their own destruction.

"None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life" (2:19).

On the other hand, wisdom is a friend, safe counselor and companion—faithful handmaid of God and instructor of His children:

"Wisdom crieth without: she uttereth her voice in the streets."

The excellence of wisdom over folly is such that verily shouts at us from every hand:

"She crieth at us in the streets, in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of gates."

At every turn, in letter of fire, it is proclaimed that—

"Wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness."

And what is wisdom? A recognition of the facts, and acting in harmony with them. A perception of things as they really are. A discernment of the true proportion and relative importance of things, all founded on the fear of the Lord.

There are things that remain and there are things that perish. Wisdom distinguishes between them. Wisdom leads us to ask ourselves why we do things and insists upon a satisfactory answer. Wisdom demands a conscious and candid examination of our activities in the light of the things that are eternal. Are we spending our substance for that which is not bread? Are we foolishly throwing our efforts and labors into a bag full of holes?

"Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she will keep thee" (Prov. 4:6).

"For whoso findeth wisdom findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord. But he that sinneth against wisdom wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate her love death" (8:35-36).

"Let every man examine himself," counsels the apostle (1 Cor. 11:28). And again, "Let no man deceive himself" (1 Cor. 3:18). For self-deception there is little cure.

"In many things we offend all," says James (3:2), and there is always hope, if we are prepared to meet the verdict of conscience and wisdom, but if we refuse to face a self-examination—if we will not recognize at least to ourselves how miserably short our best efforts come and how much God's service demands—where is the possibility of improvement?

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