

STUDIES IN PROVERBS

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1. A WORD TO THE WISE Based on Prov. 1:1-4

The legend is told of a flock of crows who had an awful battle with a farmer over a corn field. It came to the point when every time they returned he shot at them. They assembled on the edge of the woods and took council. One young and vigorous crow trust out his chest and said, "As far as I can see there are more crows than men, and we fly, which men cannot. So why not assemble and destroy these creatures who presume to govern us and drive us from our food? Then we could get all the corn we wanted, and there would be no one to stop us." An old crow on the edge of the flock interrupted him and said, "That is all very well, but in my lifetime I have observed one thing. Where there are no men, there are also no corn fields."

Enthusiasm is good, but it cannot take the place of experience and wisdom. The present generation can only truly make progress if they learn from the experience of the past. We can learn both by the wisdom and the follies of the past how to be more effective servants of God in the present. Therefore, we are going back almost three thousand years to the days of Solomon to see how relevant the wisdom of B.C. is to our A. D. lives in the modern world.

Solomon was a man with a great deal of experience in both wisdom and folly. He started well and did what was pleasing to God, and he became one of the wisest men who ever lived as an answer to his prayer that he be a wise ruler. He had riches, glory and honor, and he had wide spread fame, but he yielded to the evil influence of his foreign wives and became a fool as he departed from God's will. There are several lessons of value in this fact alone. The first is to recognize that he who stands must beware lest he fall. One must not be content wherever he is in his relationship to God. He must persevere in drawing nearer to God at all times, or he is in danger of being subtly led astray. One must put God first above all other values or he leaves himself open to folly, even though he be the wisest man alive.

The second thing we learn from Solomon as the author of this part of God's Word is that it is an error to say if a man does not practice what he preaches, it is of no value. This is not true, for God used Solomon to tell us how to be wise and live wisely even though the one he used did not always practice it. The truth is just as true when spoken by a sinner as by a saint. Never dismiss a truth because of its source. A tin cup carries water as well as a gold one, and you can be refreshed out of either vessel. Truth makes us free from ignorance even if it comes through a person who has made poor use of it. In spite of his failures God inspired Solomon to write three of the books of the Old Testament for the guidance of men for all time.

William Arnot wrote, "The fatal facility with which men glide into the worship of men may suggest another reason why some of the channels chosen for conveying the mind of God were marred by glaring deficiencies." To get a picture of what Solomon was before his folly let me read for you I Kings 4:29-34, "God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men

of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite-wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. His fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke 3 thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a 1005. He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom."

We see that Solomon's wisdom covered a great deal of ground, and so there is a great variety in the study of the proverbs. They are usually short, weighty, authoritative sayings that are the wisdom of experience compressed into few words for easy memorization. Tennyson described them as,

Jewels five words long,
That on the stretch'd forefinger of all time
Sparkle for ever.

W. A. L. Elmslie writes, "The proverb does for human life something that science does for the world of nature. It rouses the unseen eye and the unheeding ear to the marvel of what seems ordinary. As we study these proverbs we must come with a mind eager to discover new truth and wisdom. We must come with the attitude expressed by S. Hall Young in his poem:

Let me live, thinking.
Let me fare forth still with an open mind,
Fresh secrets to unfold, new truths to find,
My soul undimmed, alert, no question blinking;
Let me live, thinking.

Verse 2 begins, "To know wisdom." If there is one thing true faith is not, it is anti-intellectual. The Bible is anti-ignorance from beginning to end. The only time it condemns wisdom is when it refers to the godless wisdom of the world, and the proud knowledge of the unbeliever, which is synonymous with folly. The Christian is to be aware that all truth has its origin in God. There can never be any real conflict between science and Christianity, or any other field of study. The Christian is all for

investigation and deep study, for he knows that all truth will confirm his faith.

Solomon says these proverbs are for the purpose of aiding the believer in his intellectual life. Wisdom here is the ability to use knowledge for the highest ends. The believer must not just know facts and truths, he must know how to use them for the good life and the glory of God. To know how to do this is the Hebrew concept of wisdom. This means that wisdom is not just intellectual but also ethical and practical. It determines conduct as well as character. The intelligent man can write literature, but the wise man can write literature for the glory of God. Biblical wisdom is related completely to the pleasing of God. No matter how brilliant and talented a person is, if his knowledge and skill are not being used for God, he is not wise. This is important to note, for it makes all the difference in the world as to what is a good education. All the learning in the world that does not make one a better servant of God is only sophisticated foolishness. Someone defined wisdom as, "The expression in conduct of divine ideals for human life."

Another word Solomon uses is instruction. The idea here is discipline in training for character. These proverbs will rebuke, chastise and discipline you if you read and heed them, and prepare you to live as God wants you to do. Here again the practical is stressed. Solomon is not concerned about speculating, but is concerned that men know how to live right. Another purpose is to perceive the words of understanding, or as the RSV has it, "To understand words of insight." It is important how to learn from the wisdom of others. One will not go far on his own no matter how intelligent he is. He has to build on the insights and understanding of many who have gone before him.

Knowledge is not everything, but it is important, and God wants every believer to be as wise and intelligent as they can be. This is more important now than ever, for we live in an age of rapid growth in knowledge. Education is a bigger thing than ever, and the standard of intelligence is rising. Believers must be of the best quality in every field to be as effective as possible in their Christian witness. The book of Proverbs is in the Bible for the purpose of helping the believer be his spiritual, moral and intellectual best. The Bible does not say wisdom and knowledge are the cure-all, but it makes it clear that it offers a great deal

more hope than ignorance.

Verse 3 continues to give the purpose of the Proverbs. It is to receive the instruction of wisdom, or as the Amplified and RSV have it, "Receive instruction in wise dealing." Here again is practical living in relation to others. In fact, all of these words in verse 3 concern the social relationships. God wants the believer to be the most honest, just and fair of all people in society. Justice means to be right or straight, and to act toward others in accord with the will of God. Judgment is justice, and it refers to delivery of correct judgments on human actions. Much folly and heart ache come from false judgments, and it is God's will that His people learn to be just and not make snap or prejudice judgments on others. The believer is responsible for thorough knowledge before he makes judgments.

Gamaliel Bradford began his book on Robert E. Lee in a spirit of hostility. He had little sympathy for the South, and so he titled his book Lee the Rebel. As he studied the material and came to know this man better he decided that rebel was not quite the word he wanted, and so he changed the title to Lee the Southern. After he read more and came to know Lee well he changed his title again, and the biography was published with the title Lee the American. This illustrates the need for the believer to beware of making judgments based on inadequate information. We will see this truth often in Proverbs.

In verse 4 we have another purpose, which is to give subtlety to the simple. Modern translations use prudence or insight. Simple means the open hearted who are susceptible to impressions and are easily misled. There are believers who are over-trustful and unsuspecting. They are often duped into supporting all kinds of worthless causes. Christians are more susceptible to this than anyone since they want to be kind, and they want to have faith in people. The early Christians were so loving and trusting that some decided to take advantage of it. They posed as evangelists and the Christians took them in, fed them, and treated them like brothers. They were not wrong for doing so, for it is better to error in kindness than in meanness, but their gullibility was not an ideal. God wants His people to be discriminating. He wants them to try the spirits and be suspicious of some things until they are tested. The proverb is right that says, "All is not gold that glitters."

The fifth purpose is forgiving knowledge and discretion to the young. The proverbs are mainly intended for youth, for they most need the lessons it contains. Jerome gave these instructions to a friend for the education of his daughter: "Let her have first of all the book of Psalms for holiness of heart, and be instructed in the Proverbs of Solomon for her godly life." Jesus was, no doubt, instructed in the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is not just for the old, but to train the young to be wise all of their life. The sooner the wiser the better. Age is no limit. Paul said to Timothy, "Let no man despise your youth." A young person can be just as wise as an older person. God wants young people to grow in knowledge. Every youth should pray,

**O, God, I offer thee my heart-
In many a mystic mood, by beauty led,
I give my heart to thee, but now impart
That sterner grace-to offer thee my head.**

The young person who has given their heart and not their head is losing precious blessings and opportunities to be used of God. God wants you to gain knowledge so He can use you in more effective ways. Discretion means thoughtfulness and discernment. Gambetta said, "Great ability without discretion comes almost invariably to a tragic end." Youth is often so full of enthusiasm but so lacking in ability to discern the consequences of their actions that they thrust themselves into dangers. The Proverbs will help young people to stir their energy and enthusiasm into proper channels where they can bear fruit. The proud young crow, you recall, had a daring plan, but had he not been advised by the wisdom of the old crow, he would have been the author of the greatest folly. What the old crow was to the young crow the Proverbs are to Christian youth. They will caution and guide, and keep the minds alive to the ways of wisdom. Jesus walked this way, and we can find no better road.

2. OLD DOGS AND NEW TRICKS Based on Prov. 1:5-6

Proverbs by their very nature are often paradoxical, and they often seem to contradict one another. They only do so, however, if we take them

as absolutes which are true in every case. If we take them as stating a truth of a segment of reality, and not all of reality, we will see there are no contradictions. This will come up in our study of inspired proverbs as well, but for now let me give you an example from manmade proverbs. Aeschylus, the ancient Greek, said, "It is always in season for an old man to learn." A more modern saying is, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." They appear to be contradictory, but they can both be true if we apply them to what we know of human life.

We know that once a pattern of life has been established an older person often resists any change. He is content with his pattern of life and has no desire to adjust to new way of thought or action. It is when one meets such persons and finds it impossible to alter their pattern one iota that he goes away quoting the proverb, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." It fits the facts of life, and so it is true, but a thing can be true and not be the truth. If you make it an absolute truth and apply it to all people you ignore other facts of life. History is filled with examples of old people who have broken out of the ruts of the past and become pioneers of new ideas. The facts of life prove the proverb true that you are never too old to learn.

John Stuart Blackie says that the Scottish people have a reputation of being prudent and of having foresight because of their custom of printing the book of Proverbs in a separate volume so that farmers and workingmen can carry them in their pocket and read while they rest. They believed that old dogs could learn new tricks, and they took deliberate steps to teach them. This is the attitude of Solomon as well, and we see this brought out in the sixth purpose for the writing of the Proverbs.

In verse 5 he says, "A wise man will hear and increase learning." He had just referred to the young men, and now he goes on to say that the older men can and will go on in their learning by the reading of these proverbs. They are not only for youth, but for people of all ages because God knows that old dogs can still learn new tricks. A wise man is one who has learned to use his knowledge for the glory of God, but he is well aware of his lack of knowledge. He wants to know more because the more he knows the more he has to use in serving God.

It is only the ignorant and the superficially educated who think they know all they need to know, the wise man is well aware of how little he knows. Someone said, "Knowing is largely a means of discovering the vastness of one's ignorance." The truly educated man is one who is never embarrassed by a new idea. He knows that there are thousands of ideas he has never heard. Many times I have heard Christians say, "I never heard of that before." They imply that it cannot be valid if they have never heard of it. This verse tells us that it is God's will that we go on and increase in learning, and never be content with our present status. Depth is to be our goal. There is a well-known proverb that is the first line to a longer poem written by Pope that expresses this point well, that shallowness leads to folly, but depth will lead to a life pleasing to God and appealing to man.

**A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring,
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.**

Shallowness always leads to folly, but depth, when it is directed by wisdom, will lead to a life pleasing to God and appealing to man. Very seldom is a truly wise man proud. He is humbled because he knows so well how little he really knows. Paul is a good example, for his pattern of life and philosophy had already been established, and yet, by the grace of God, he learned some new tricks. His life was changed, and he became the greatest theologian in Christianity. Right to the end he kept studying and learning, and God could use him to impart His Word to the world. Who else but a man of Paul's depth could write letters that would be used of God to change the course of history and instruct millions down through history?

Paul never stopped learning, but he was eager to read right up to his death. He asked Timothy to bring him the books and the parchments when he was in captivity waiting to be executed. Paul was an intellectual and revealed it. Festus even thought he was a fanatic and had studied himself into insanity. In Acts 26:24 he shouted, "You are out of your mind Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane." It is not believers who are anti-intellectual, for we believe that depth knowledge in every realm leads one to God. The unbeliever is almost always superficial in his

understanding of God's revelation. They would be ashamed to speak on any other subject with so little knowledge, but in their blindness to the vastness of God's wisdom in His Word they speak against it. This is the truly anti-intellectual attitude, and God rightly brands them as fools.

Solomon says that the wise man will go on learning and adds, "A man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." The Berkley version has, "Attain unto leadership." The Hebrew word is used of sailors and their ability to steer a ship. The idea is that the man of understanding might learn to apply what is in his head to life, and become more competent in whatever he does. He has to really know the ropes to become a leader in his field. This is a very practical goal, and it is God's will for each of His children to become skillful and competent. It may be that one will only learn how to be skillful with a needle, but let us not underestimate any skill, for Dorcus used her skill with a needle for the glory of God, and she became a marvelous servant. Whatever you do, you are to do your best and keep striving to do better. Nothing can be too high of a quality for God.

Verse 6 says, "For understanding proverbs and parables, and sayings and riddles of the wise." One of the values of the proverbs is that they are what might be called brain food. They cause you to gain skill in the understanding of other men's thoughts and wisdom. The Bible becomes a textbook to train our minds in the understanding of non-biblical sources. The Bible makes no claim to contain all truth, even though it does contain the most essential truths, and is the only source of saving truth. There are many things outside the Bible that are just as true as those in the Bible. The value of knowing the Bible well, and the proverbs specifically is that it increases the believer's ability to grasp what is of value in other sources. In short, Proverbs is a course in the liberal arts. It broadens one's vision and enables one to reap from many fields.

In the second part of the verse it sounds as if Solomon assumes that believers are just delighted in going deep into the knowledge and wisdom of the universe. This does not fit the facts always, for many Christians are content to look for only that which will entertain them. Erasmus in his book Praise Of Folly, which was published in 1509, said that Christians cared not for what was solid. He wrote, "Does anyone need proof of this? Let him visit the churches, and assuredly he will find it; if solemn truth is

dwelt on, the listeners at once become weary, yawn and sleep, but if the orator begins some silly tale, they are all attention." Has almost 500 years changed things? Not if Roger Hazelton's judgment is correct. He writes in his book *Renewing The Mind*, "Who can deny that the power of sustained and searching thought has been all but lost among us? We live, it is obvious, primarily at the beck of interest and the call of impulse rather than under the guidance of illuminating ideas. Relentless pressures from without determine choice and dictate conduct long before there is any chance to weigh alternatives or foresee results."

If this be true, and, like he says, who can deny it, there are not going to be too many people who profit from this purpose of the proverbs, which is that of becoming able to understand the deep and often obscure words of the wise. The vast majority has already concluded there is nothing to it anyway. Everything worth knowing is right on the surface is their conclusion. We do not have to have anything against the virtue of simplicity to recognize that not all that is of value is simple. There is real depth of knowledge and wisdom to be gained from God's Word that few ever find because it costs too much to dig for it. It takes discipline to descend to the depths.

We have to beware of thinking that confusion is depth, however, for this is what we see in much theology. It sounds profound, but it does nothing for the soul. Authentic truth and deep insights will prove themselves by thrilling the soul and causing the believer to praise God. The object is not just to go deep, but to strike riches. Many go deep, but they bring back no gold. Solomon feels that knowing these proverbs will help the believer not only to go deep, but to strike it rich. They will help him grasp the deep insights of others, and help him to unravel their riddles. We have to admit that when Solomon did something he did it big. He sets a very impressive list of goals for himself to achieve in the lives of others. He offers great gifts to those who will pay the price of thought and obedience. As we begin our search in these mines of Solomon I trust that all of us will be more healthy, wealthy and wise as a result, and thereby prove again that you can teach an old dog new tricks.

3. WHERE KNOWLEDGE BEGINS Based on Prov. 1:7

A millennium and a half ago Diogenes said, "The foundation of every state is the education of its youth." Both ancient and modern philosophers have recognized that education is basic to the making and keeping of any great and strong nation great and strong. Lowell said, "It is in making education not only common to all, but in some sense compulsory on all, that the destiny of the free republic of America was practically settled." No one can deny that there is a correlation between our greatness as a nation and our education system. The opposite is equally obvious. In nations where people are kept ignorant we do not find greatness, nor anything that is attractive and appealing to man's highest and noblest desires. In America, however, we find these things such as freedom, rights, justice and multitudes of opportunities to develop and expand one's life.

Christians cannot doubt, nor can any historian deny that this is due in large measure to the fact that God's Word played a major role in America's educational system. The tragedy is that men in their worldly wisdom have come to the point where they are willing to play the fool and remove from our educational system any biblical teaching. The removal of prayer has also made our educational system closed to God. It is the very foundation that has been removed if our text is true.

Verse 7 cause me to see the whole issue of prayer and the Bible in the public school in a new light. This verse brings God into relationship with all knowledge. In essence it is saying that any education that ignores God, and which does not seek to instill in students a reverence for God, is merely training then in being more effectively evil with better and more modern means. Aldous Huxley said, "We have improved means toward unimproved ends." Maybe what was practiced in many schools before prayer was forbidden was not too effective, but I can see why even as a symbol it is important, for to deny God any place in one's education is to deny that He is important in one of the most important aspects of our life and nation, and this easily leads to denying that He is of any importance at all. It tends toward the secularizing of all of life. America could well be destroying that foundation that made her great.

Verse 7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." The first thing preachers always tend to do is to assure people that fear

does not mean fear, but reverence. This is correct, and it is wrong to get the impression that we are to be afraid of God. C. S. Lewis reminds us, however, that it is possible to so water down the concept of fear that it is useless to motivate us. He writes, "Servile fear is, to be sure the lowest form of religion. But a god such that there could never be occasion for even servile fear, a safe god, a tame god, soon proclaims himself to any sound mind as a fantasy. I have met no people who fully disbelieved in hell and also had a living and life-giving belief in heaven."

Jesus said, "Fear not those who can kill the body and that is all they can do, but fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell." Paul said, "Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men." Reverence for God must include the awareness that there is real danger in not walking in His will. Reverence must never be limited to merely being quiet in church. Reverence must characterize our whole pattern of life. To fear God is to live constantly a life that pleases God. Such an attitude, if it is kept consciously before us, is that determining factor in what we become as believers. Without this we do not even begin to become what we ought to be. To fear God is to fear all else less, and this enables one to do what is best and right without the fear of men that enslaves so many and compels them to walk in paths that lead to destruction.

Young people who truly fear God will rather disappoint their friends than Him. They will rather face the disapproval of men than the disapproval of God. To fear God is the only way to freedom. For those who do not are bound by their nature and environment to be fools. Only the believer who is a God-fearer is free to be wise, and to choose a course of life that bears fruit for time and eternity. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Lord equals Jehovah. It is not just fearing any god, but Jehovah only. The fear of other gods is the beginning of ignorance. Volumes could be written on the tragic follies that exist because men fear false gods. Franklin O. Nelson tells of a 15-year-old boy who was shot in the leg. He was a Christian boy with a pagan father. He was taken to the mission hospital and cared for, for 4 days, and then the father came and took him out to a place where he sacrificed a cow to appease the evil spirits. Meanwhile he and others had a drunken feast, and the boy bled to death. Fear of a false god was the cause of this folly. It is only the fear of Jehovah that has led to all the knowledge that daily saves people from foolish suffering and death.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. We have made it clear that fear means reverence, and the Lord means Jehovah, but the hard part is still ahead. What does it mean that the attitude of reverence toward the one true God is the beginning of knowledge? The facts of life compel us to recognize that there are brilliant atheists, learned agnostics and scholarly skeptics who do not fear God at all. Like the unjust judge in the parable of Jesus, they fear not God, nor regard man, yet this does not mean that the judge did not know his law practice. He was, no doubt, an excellent lawyer, and had a vast knowledge in his field. All godly people are not learned, nor are all irreverent people stupid. These facts make it clear that this verse does not mean that without reverence for God men cannot learn any knowledge.

The Hebrew word for beginning is from rosh, which means head, and so it can mean either the starting point or the chief point. G. Campbell Morgan feels very definitely that the proper reading here is chief point. The Amplified Version combines the two concepts and says, "The reverent and worshipful fear of the Lord is the beginning, and the principle and choice part of knowledge-that is, its starting point and its essence." In other words, though a man may learn many things, if he does not reverence God, he remains a fool, for he does not know the most important thing there is to know in all human knowledge. It is better to know nothing else and reverence God than to know all else and not fear God. Faust complains,

**I've studied now philosophy
And juris prudence, medicine,-
And even, alas! Theology,-
From end to end, with labor keen,
And here, poor fool! with all my lore
I stand, no wiser than before....
These ten years long, with many woes,
I've led my scholars by the nose,-
And see, that nothing can be known.**

He was wrong on his conclusion because he started wrong. He did not start with the fear of God, and the result was, he ended up with many facts but no meaning and purpose. The end was pessimism and despair. The beginning is the only place to start one's education. The Christian is

optimistic and believes man can know much and be very wise, but he must begin at the beginning for reverence for God. This is the alphabet of knowledge. Teach a child the alphabet and all the literature of the language becomes available to him as possible knowledge. When we fear God, we have the foundation laid on which we can build wisely in any area of study. The believer is not always the most brilliant in his field, but he has the most enduring foundation, for when all else ceases to be, that which he knows endures forever. To fear God then is the chief part of all knowledge.

Education will not bring men to God, but God brings men to be truly educated. The Christian has high regard for education, but not a part from the reverence for God. Horace Mann felt if there were enough schools there would be no need for jails, but we know this is superficial optimism based on an inadequate view of man's sinful nature. We must not react by denying the value of education, but by pointing out what is missing in such a view, and that is the fear of God. We do not oppose knowledge and instruction, but we must oppose the attempt to eliminate the reverence for God from our educational system.

Fools despise wisdom and instruction. This does not mean a fool does not think he is wise and instructed. He feels just the opposite, for he feels he is wise and so does not need anything from others. A well known traveler was on a journey, and he was being bored by a man who forced himself upon him, and made a great deal of his vast learning. He stood it as long as he could and then said, "My friend, you and I know all that can be known." The man smiled with the sense of satisfaction and said, "How is that?" "Well," said the traveler, "You know everything except that you are a fool, and I know that." It is important to recognize our limitations, and not try to talk people into believing we are all knowing. Someone said, "None but the fool is always right."

The Hebrew word for fool comes from the root for thick brained and stubborn, but it carries the idea also of moral deficiency. Such persons laugh and mock at what they do not understand, as if that was proof that it was of no value. This can be true of the intellectual as well as the ignorant. The intellectual is often very anti-intellectual in his attitudes toward fields of knowledge outside of his own. Without the fear of God they become their own absolute, and they judge all by its appeal or lack of appeal to

themselves.

The fool has said in his heart that there is no God, and the result is that there is no fear of God, and so even though he may be a learned man he does not know the alphabet of ultimate knowledge. Thomas Carlyle has a unique way of saying this. He wrote, "The man who cannot wonder, who does not habitually wonder (and worship), were he president of enumerable royal societies, and cared the whole of Mekanique Celeste and Hegel's philosophy, and the epitome of all Laboratories and Observatories with their results, in his simple head,-is but a Pair of Spectacles behind which there is no eye." This is but another way of saying that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

4. HOW TO BE AN ATTRACTIVE YOUTH Based on Prov. 1:8-9

Every young person wants to be attractive. Teens suddenly discover that they are drawn to each other because of their attractiveness, and they want to be attractive themselves. It is then that the mirror, mirror on the wall become the idol of them all. They become very sensitive about their body, and if they are slow in development they worry about being different. Teens don't want to be different. They all want to be beautiful and handsome, and in every way attractive.

This is not only natural, but it is also wonderful. It can lead to vanity, but it is also important for maturity. God loves beauty in the physical and spiritual realm. He is the author of all the beauty in creation as well as the beauty of holiness. Jesus was attractive in His humanity. He had all the qualities of a man that every teen dreams of having. He was attractive to men, women and children. He was powerful and yet gentle. He was forceful and yet kind. He could melt hearts with His love, but also throw fear into hearts with His anger.

Jesus, no doubt, took good care of His body, and was always pleasant in appearance. This was not the essential ingredient of His attractiveness, however, for He urged His followers not to be overly concerned about the external to the neglect of the internal. Solomon in all his glory was not so

beautiful as the lily, which does not work at being attractive at all. It just grows according to its nature. Jesus said we too can become attractive on the same principle. It can be a natural process if we do as He did and taught. He said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." The key factor in becoming attractive with eternal beauty is obedience. Nature simply obeys the laws of God for it, and it produces beauty.

You may be asking, what does this have to do with the text in Proverbs where the theme is obedience to parents? What is the connection between obedience to parents and obedience to God? The connection was one that was important in the life of Jesus, and is important in the life of every young person who desires to be all that God wants them to be. You recall how Jesus remained in the temple when he was 12, and he caused quite a scare on the part of Joseph and Mary. When they asked Him why He did it He told them that He must be about His Father's business. But then Luke tells us, "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." All we know about Jesus from age 12 to 30 is found in that statement and one other. We only know that in those 18 years He was obedient to His parents, and that He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Jesus lived through His teens and 20's as a youth who was attractive. He had favor with both God and man. He experienced what every teen wants, and that is attractiveness and acceptance. All of this took place after He said He must be about His Father's business, and I can't help but see that the Scripture is making clear that learning to obey one's parents is God's business. One can never be a mature servant of Christ until he learns to obey authority, and even Jesus in His humanity needed to be trained in obedience. This played a major role in His attractiveness as a man.

Young people seem to feel that rebellion is the real way to maturity. To ignore authority and be indifferent to standards of morality is their goal. They gain attention by this, but it is not lasting or satisfying as a pattern of life. The only adequate pattern is that which Christ established. Men through the centuries have demonstrated this by growing up with respect for authority, and especially the authority of parents, which is essential preparation for obedience to the authority of God.

Our goal as believers is obedience to God, but one of the basic means to this end is obedience to parents. George F. Knight wrote, "The responsibility of being a Christian is appalling. The Christian is called not primarily to being good, nor to rejoice in a self-conscious faith, nor even to a search for holy living. The ladder may even turn out to be the ultimate form of selfishness. The Christian is called to obedience, utter obedience to the voice of God. And it is as he obeys the voice that goodness, faith and holiness come to him." That which made Christ attractive, and that which has made every person in history who has been spiritually attractive is that which is still essential to be an attractive youth today, and that is obedience.

Having established the goal, let us now consider the wisdom of Solomon as to the means. This verse tells us a great deal about what God expects of parents as well as youth. The assumption on which the proverb is based is that the parents are both godly and teachers. This is not unconditional and absolute wisdom. I know of young people whose lives are repulsive, and whose characters are ugly because they have followed their parent's teachings. This proverb is only truly wisdom when applied to the homes, which fulfill the conditions, and that is where the parents are teaching and training their youth to live godly lives.

This means that a young persons spiritual attractiveness can be marred or hindered by parents who are not living in obedience to God's will. The tragic truth is that few parents are playing the role that the Bible assumes that they will. Young people are left on their own to learn by trial and error. This is especially true in the whole area of sex education. We read a great deal about sex in the Proverbs, and there are many frank warnings of the dangers. Studies indicate that parents in America are doing next to nothing to give guidelines to youth in this area. Even Christian parents seem to be caught up in the cloud of indifference. We wouldn't think of letting our children run about poorly clothed and poorly fed, for care of the body is in harmony with the materialism of our age. But we neglect the minds and souls of our children, and we leave them at the mercy of the perverted influences of the world.

This proverb is worthless to the millions of teens whose parents are not giving them guidance and instruction. The best thing the church can do for the home is to seek to make it what the Bible assumes it will be and

that is a place of learning where parents are preparing their children to walk in obedience to God. Where this is true Solomon says in verse 8, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction.." The problem with young people is often that they just will not listen. They get their mind set and will not take the time and effort to listen and think through the instruction of their father. This is just as wrong in the parent, of course, and we see here that the father is to instruct and not just demand blind submission.

Often young people do not listen because it is not instruction they hear, but only the sound of opposition. Teens are yet immature in many ways, but they are rational and are the peak of their demand for reason and logic. If parents seek to guide them by emotion and poorly supported opinions, they will have none to blame but themselves if they create rebellion. Look at how you get fed up with the superficial arguments of public leaders. Young people expect sound evidence and good sense to support the guidance received from parents. Everything that is truly biblical and Christian can be taught with this being true, and when it is, young people have the same obligation to obey their parents as they do to obey God.

Fear of God is the principle part of knowledge, and respect and obedience to parents is the path that most young people take to reach that goal. It is rare, and maybe even impossible, to find a young person who has no respect for his parents who has reverence for God. The facts of life and your own experience will tell you that obedience to God and parents are closely related, for young people's attitude toward one is usually the same toward the other. This is why it is so important for both parents and young people to work at building up a relationship of teacher and student. Notice how Solomon includes both parents and adds, "And do not forsake your mother's teaching." Mom and dad are equal partners in this business of teaching, and again, we see that the piety of the parents is assumed.

Often, even in biblical times, the mother had the largest responsibility in teaching. Men had to work and go to war, and the result was that the burden fell on the mother. Jesus likely learned most of his basic knowledge from Mary, and we know this was the case with Timothy, whose mother and grandmother instructed him in Bible knowledge when he was only a little boy. A Chinese proverb says, "When you educate a

man, you educate an individual. When you educate a woman, you educate a whole family." The essential thing to see here is that the home is a unity, and children are obligated to obey both parents and walk in the ways that they guide. There are many exceptions to this ideal, and homes are not always characterized by this kind of unity. Even so, young people are obligated to obey their parents teaching as long as it conforms to the will of God.

Solomon goes on in verse 9 to say of the parent's teaching, "They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck." Here is the kind of jewelry that God approves of. In other words, obedience to the wise teaching of your parents will do for you what it did for Jesus. It will cause you to grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. It will attain for you the very thing your heart desires, and that is to be attractive. A youth who is obedient and respectful of authority is a gem, and they are soon appreciated and loved by all who come to know them.

These ornaments of character will last when all else decays, and when all the fads are faded. With these one is always in style, and at the same time always in step with the Savior. The necklace that obedience will place around your neck will make you more attractive than all the diamonds in the royal crowns of Europe.

5. HOW NOT TO BE A JUVENILE DELINQUENT Prov. 1:10-11

A father and his son were riding in a trolley car and the father decided to have fun with his boy. He lifted his cap off his head and pretended to throw it out of the window. The boy started to cry, but the father solved the problem by snapping his fingers and producing the cap before the boy. The boy's tears disappeared and he grinned with delight at his father's amazing ability to bring back his cap with the snap of a finger. He said, "That's fun, lets do it again." And before his father could intervene he threw his cap out the window.

This was only innocent fun, of course, but it illustrates how one who is admired can influence the conduct of the immature. They can be made to

do foolish things by the influence of false impressions received from adults. Teens are not so immature as that little boy, and they are not likely to be impressed with such sham magic as bringing things back by finger snapping, but the fact is, they are still at a very impressionable age. They can be deeply impressed by charming appeals to follow a path that leads to the loss of far more than a cap, but to the loss of their good name, and possibly even the crown of righteousness. Solomon was well aware of the dangers that a young person faces in terms of being misguided by alluring appeals to sin, and he makes this his first matter of instruction to his son after he told of how obedience to instruction would lead to attractiveness of character.

Verse 10 begins with a negative on what not to do. It is important to recognize that youth need some basic don'ts to follow to help them avoid many of the problems and sins that youth fall into. Solomon says that if sinners entice you, do not give into them. He prepares his son for what is almost inevitable. The word for sinners means those who are habitual delinquents. They are those who delight in and willfully follow the path of crime and sin. It is important to note that the warning is not against the enticement of sin, but of the sinner.

Young people need to recognize that the personal element is the source of the power of deception. If you ever hope to escape the snare of Satan you must be aware of this fact. The personal element is the power behind both sin and salvation. It is not only the Gospel that wins people to Christ, but the person who presents and embodies the Gospel. Likewise, it is not just sin in itself that attracts and entices, but the sinner who embodies the life of sin. It is the attractive and glamorous appeal of the movie stars, and not just their sins that entices young people to follow their footsteps to folly. Many a sinful person has a very appealing and persuasive personality that enables them to become heroes to many young people. Many atheistic professors are charming, witty and intelligent, and they influence many students to follow the path of unbelief. Atheism would never attract them, but the atheist can and does.

In the realm of crime that Solomon is concerned about at this point, it is almost the enticement of persons that causes an otherwise good young person to become a part of a crime. The smooth talking young thief who has gotten by with it may urge you to join him for some easy money, and

that can be a real danger. It is not robbery but the robber who can entice you. You might think that all of this is quite irrelevant to your life, and for some of you it may very well be, but for thousands of youth, even from Christian homes, it is relevant. Remember that Solomon is speaking to a young person brought up in a godly home. If it was not possible for a godly young person to be deceived by devilish delinquents, there would be no need for this warning in the first place.

Every Christian young person must honestly recognize that the evils of their generation can ensnare them. Do not try and fool yourself, and approach life with a blind and naive attitude about your weak and sinful nature. All that happens to the non-Christian can ensnare you as well. Studies show that 85% of the young people who get into trouble with the police had a church background, and they were from homes where parents were church members. The enticement to crime and sin is universal, and reaches all young people to some degree. There is so much money involved in enticing youth that it has become a major industry. Christian youth are targets for this constant bombardment of enticement to evil.

What is Solomon's instruction as to what to do in this situation? The cultures are vastly different, and even the crimes may be different, but the answer is just as simple as ever-say no, and do not consent. To be enticed is not sin, for sin is an act of the will. It is saying yes to the enticement, or the enticer. Here is the simple way of avoiding any danger of ever becoming a juvenile delinquent. In my early teens I ran around with two boys who wanted to break into a warehouse of a candy company and steal some candy. I knew it was wrong, and even though I was a superficial Christian, I refused to take part. Both of these boys became juvenile delinquents, and eventually ended up in prison. I escaped it only because I had had enough instruction in Sunday school to be sensitive to the evil of stealing, and I was able to say no. It is that simple. Just say no and refuse to do evil, and Satan himself will be unable to plot your record.

We need to be honest, however, and recognize that it is not easy to say no. The will must be conditioned to be able to resist enticement, and this is why obedience from the earliest age is so important. Enticement to do wrong is often so strong emotionally that the will if not well disciplined will not be able to resist. This is the very reason why discipline plays so large a place in the preparation of a soldier. In the midst of battle the

emotional strain is so strong that if the will has not been conditioned to obey orders under all conditions a man could go all to pieces. He could act foolishly in some wild attempt to save himself, and as a result place himself and others at the mercy of the enemy. Christian youth face a battle also, and to be a good soldier of Christ they must be disciplined to say yes to Him as their commander, and no to the traitor within that would give you over to the enemy.

Your will must be trained to be stronger than your want. Reason must be superior to emotion. For example, you can want a piece of cake before supper, but you can will to wait until after supper. The will must always keep the wants under control and allow them only to be satisfied according to what is wise. A young person who lets his wants control his conduct is almost certainly headed for trouble, for his very nature wants much that is harmful to his life. The question of why do you do this or that, or why do you have to go here or there is often answered by saying, "Because I want to." Young people must beware of thinking that everything that is a want should be pursued. Solomon's son may feel he wants to join the boys and have some entertainment, and get in on some of the fun and easy money, but Solomon is saying he is not to go by his wants, but to go by his will, which is to obey his godly instruction.

I remember a professor once saying that he does something everyday he would rather not do just to discipline his will to be superior to his wants. This makes sense, and especially for youth, for they must learn to obey what is wise and best even when the strong enticements to evil confront them. A person who always does what he wants is spoiled spiritually, and he will refuse to counter his wants and say no even when the want is evil and foolish. The value of obeying parents even when the happen to be wrong is the discipline of the will which will make you a better person. A blunt refusal is the only answer to enticement, and those who cannot say no to wants are going to have a very difficult time. Those who can remember these basic ideas, however, will certainly be victorious. They are, beware of the personal appeal to sin and crime, and discipline your will to say no to evil even though your sinful flesh wants to say yes.

Now we will consider briefly the actual appeal of the sinner in verse 11. The first thing I notice is the attitude of shocking independence. This appeals to the adolescent mind. It says that we are somebody and we are

tough. We can do in life as we please, and need not bow to any law. There is an appeal here to ambush others. There is a sort of bragging about the innocence of their victims. They are not enemies, but just poor creatures who are not as fit to survive as we are. These are the words of depraved rough necks who kick old people to death just for fun. Such wicked attitudes should make us realize that it is nonsense to imply that youth are worse today than they have ever been. Brutal crimes by youth have been a part of human society ever since Cain maliciously murdered his unsuspecting brother Abel.

The violence pictured here is still relevant, for in many parts of the world there is very little law enforcement, much like it was in the early days of our own country. This lying in wait to rob and kill was a regular part of the West. This may not be as relevant to our particular environment, but it is relevant to people somewhere in the world at all times. Robbery and murder is happening everywhere because people are being enticed by the appeal from evil minds. The only way for youth to escape the dangers of such minds is to learn early to say no to all enticements to evil. This is the only way to not become a juvenile delinquent.

6. THE VOICE OF WISDOM Based on Prov. 1:20-29

"Integrity and wisdom are essential to success in this business," said the boss to the new employee. He said, "Integrity means that when you promise a customer something, you keep that promise, even if we loose money." "And what is wisdom," asked the employee? "That," replied the boss, "Consists in not making such foolish promises." Even the voice of worldly wisdom must sometimes be silent. There is a time to speak and a time to refrain from speaking. In our text we see the wisdom of God varies from shouting from the housetops to being stone silent depending on the response of the listeners. We see the voice of wisdom as a shouting voice, then as a shunned voice, and finally as a silent voice.

I. THE SHOUTING VOICE.

Verse 20 says, "Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public square." The call here means to vibrate the voice in loud clear ringing tones. Wisdom is pictured as a public voice available to every ear that will listen. She is in the streets and markets where the people are not in some secluded ivory tower where the voice is available to just a few hermits and introverted scholars.. There is nothing secret or private about wisdom. It does not fear the light as does sin and folly. Like Jesus, it goes in search of the lost and ignorant. The common people heard Jesus gladly, for he came to them and sent his disciples into their villages to reach them where they were. This is God's method. He makes the truth that people need to know available to all the people, and not just to the great and mighty. The voice of wisdom is shouting for all to hear. Whatever is wise is the voice of God.

Notice that wisdom is personified. It is pictured as a person and not a mere abstract idea. Personhood is of the very essence of God, and so whatever represents God is personified. It is interesting that wisdom is pictured as a woman rather than a man. Women would like to believe that the reason Solomon was so wise was because he had so many wives to consult. It is true that in Judaism there is no thought of women being unwise. The Jewish scholar Plaut wrote, "Unlike many other cultures, Judaism never considered women mentally inferior." Christians inherited the concept of the equality of women, and so it is no surprise that wisdom should be pictured as feminine.

Verse 21 just adds to the emphasis of her availability. The Amplified Version has it, "She cries at the head of the noisy intersections-the chief gathering places, at the entrance of the city she speaks." Even at this point where the competition is greatest, and where the voices of the world seek to drown out anything else, there is the voice of wisdom shouting to be heard amidst all the racket. Anyone who truly wants to know what is wise, and what is the godly path and pattern for life, can find out. This was true in Solomon's day, and in our day as well. The truth is available to all who will listen. The problem has never been that God has not spoken. The problem has always been that men choose to be deaf and refuse to listen to the shouting voice of wisdom.

All of history and every daily paper shouts out the truth with contemporary evidence to prove it that the wages of sin is death, but the

vast majority ignore the voice and continue on the path to destruction. That is why we hear the voice of wisdom shouting in verse 22, "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways?" Ignorance is bliss is the attitude of the simple. They enjoy not knowing wisdom, for it calls for commitment, and this leads to sacrifice and inconvenience. The simple want to follow the path of least resistance in which they only have to decide what is for their best interest. They choose to be indifferent and thoughtless about others.

There have been periods when even believers thought that being ignorant and uninvolved was an important part of piety. It was this way for the early Baptists of America. Many of the old preachers were not only indifferent to education, but they fought every attempt to improve the training of young ministers. Men can be just as proud of their ignorance as they are of their brilliance. Solomon is not likely to referring to the believer here, however, but to the sinner who refuses to believe. Arnot wrote, "The simple are those who are characterized more by the absence of any good rather than positive evil." The world is full of people who do not live outright wicked lives, but who likewise do not live lives of positive witness of the glory of God. They are content to be neutral in the great battle between good and evil. The Bible makes it clear that there is no neutrality, for one who does not love wisdom is a fool, even if he does not oppose wisdom.

The scoffer is more actively evil, for he does not just ignore wisdom, but has an attitude of contempt for it. The scoffer exalts his own ego by tearing down and ridiculing whatever he does not understand. He assumes that he is the measure of all things, and if something does not appeal to him it is just nonsense. He glories and delights in his supposed superiority. We always feel superior to that which we scoff at. This brings out the worst in human pride. We laugh at what we do not understand and feel superior, but we are being fools in doing so. A Christian needs to be very careful about what he scoffs at, for he may very well be copying the ways of the fool. If you do not understand something, be silent until you do.

We live in an age of rapid increase in knowledge, and there is so much that none of us fully understand, and so it is a constant danger to be proud and scoff at that which we do not grasp. Scoffers of godly wisdom increase in proportion to the ignorance of spiritual values. It is no wonder that the

Bible indicates an increase of scoffers in the last days. How long, cries wisdom to the scoffer, will you delight in scoffing? The answer is, of course, until they close their foolish mouth and open their ears to hear the voice of wisdom.

Wisdom moves on then to the fools who hate knowledge. The word fool, says Maclaren, is short hand for mental stupidity, moral obstinacy, and dogged godlessness. It is the fool who says in his heart there is no God, and mainly because he does not want there to be a God. Note the progressive nature of these three. The simple ignore knowledge, the scoffer ridicules it, but the fool hates it. The truth is his greatest foe. We have here a picture of that which is just the opposite of what a believer ought to be. The believer is to love wisdom and truth, and they are to delight in understanding and knowledge. They are to hate ignorance and folly. Wisdom cries out to the fools asking how long they will remain in that state.

In verse 23 we see the essence of the Gospel. It is a call to repentance with a promise of salvation from folly. It is a parallel with the Gospel, which is a call to forsake sin and become saved, but here is it a call to forsake stupidity and become wise. The Old Testament, like the New Testament, assumes that men can listen to the voice of wisdom and choose to turn from folly. The voice of wisdom is sincere, and offers great promises to those who will respond. The sinner must give heed to the voice of wisdom and respond, and that is all he can do, but God will accomplish the rest. God will pour out His heart to them and make His thoughts known. Here we see the free will of man and the sovereignty of God working together to bring the sinner out of darkness into light. God takes the lead in proclaiming the good news that salvation or wisdom is possible, and where it meets with an obedient response, God fulfills the promise. So close is the parallel that if you put Christ in the place of wisdom you have the New Testament Gospel in the Old Testament. We see next that the Old Testament Gospel can also be rejected.

II. THE SHUNNED VOICE.

I use the shunned because it means to deliberately avoid, and that is what we see in verse 24. It is not the case that they did not hear, but that they refused to listen. Wisdom calls but it does not compel or coerce. If a

man chooses to remain a fool, God will not make him wise in spite of himself. Wisdom has shouted and stretched out her hand to help, but man can refuse to regard her offer. Arnot wrote, "God will not put forth a hand to lift a man to heaven in his sleep, or drag him in against his will."

Verse 25 shows them to have ignored the offer of wisdom. They hear only what they want to, and they do not want to hear God. Verse 26 pictures wisdom as laughing at the fools when they reap the consequences of rejecting her offer. It sounds strange that she would laugh, but if we think deeper we can grasp the experience pictured here. When a person does something very stupid, and they get injured in the process, it brings forth laughter. Let a foolish student throw an eraser when the teacher is not looking, and it glances off the wall and hits him in the eye, and all the class will burst out laughing, even if the consequences are a damaged eye and expulsion from school. Acts of utter stupidity shock the observer and produce laughter. It is funny to see evil plans backfire and trap the planner instead of the victim. Wisdom is displaying a recognized humorous emotion, which is laughter at the utter stupidity of rejecting God's offer of light while they sit in darkness.

III. THE SILENT VOICE.

In verse 28 we see the limitations even of God for acceptance, for those who constantly reject His wisdom will not be heard. When His wisdom was shouting they ignored her, and now when they shout in desperate need of her, she is silent. Let this stand as a biblical witness against the effectiveness of foxhole religion. He who rejects God when all is well has very little guarantee of being heard when trouble strikes. That is, of course if the rejection has been many times over, and the heart is hardened.

When one does not turn to God except when in trouble it proves that if sin did not bring evil consequences they would never call on Him. God is aware of any exceptions and the different motives of men, but as a pattern we must say that the Bible offers little hope to those who wait until judgment before they cry for mercy. Even prayer may be powerless after persistent rejection, for there is a point of no return.

Notice that they even seek diligently, and not half hearted. They now

have a desperate need for God, but it is now nowhere to be found. The day of grace is gone and the night of judgment has arrived. This is proof positive that they could have called on God before this. Here is proof that they were aware of the voice of wisdom and could have listened, but they refused. Man does have the capacity to receive God's call and respond if they will. If they were unable they would not be guilty, but because they were able, silence is now there only reply.

Verse 29 makes clear their guilt. Plout writes, "Judaism has consistently supported the doctrine of man's ultimate freedom of will." Verses 31 and 32 show that God does not have to punish them for by just leaving them alone they receive the consequences of their folly, and that is judgment enough. In verse 33 the voice of wisdom closes on a note of optimism after portraying the end of those who listen not. Those who listen are assured of salvation and security just as the New Testament offers to those who hear Christ. The voice of wisdom is the voice of Christ.

7. FIRST PLACE ONLY Based on Prov. 2:4-5

Gerald Kennedy in his book *The Christian And His America* tells of hearing the head of one of the largest airplane companies at a luncheon where he was reporting on the situation facing America in the field of air defense. He described the growth of our air force, and the probable growth of the air strength of Russia. Then he made a major point and said, "There is no such thing as a second best air force." If your planes will reach an elevation of 50 thousand feet and your enemies planes will reach 55 thousand feet, your fleet, for all practical purposes, is obsolete. He added, "It is like having a second best hand in poker." You don't have to know much about poker to get the point. There are some things in which second best just doesn't count at all. Only first place is a winner.

This being the case, we must determine in our system of values what those things are which must be supreme, and that can only be thought of as first place only goals. In the realm of knowledge, for example, the believer must recognize that the knowledge of God must be supreme. It is

a goal that must be in first place only, for if it is any less than first, and if he tries to make it his second highest goal, then he has, for all practical purposes, displaced God for an idol of some sort, which he has put in first place.

Idolatry is a constant danger even for a Christian, just as it was for the Old Testament saints. We must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. God said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." This is God's supreme demand. By His very nature God cannot tolerate any other position than first place in the life of His children. He would not be supreme if anyone or anything stood in a place of higher allegiance than Himself. That is why Solomon makes it clear to his son that body, mind and soul must be committed to the search if one is to find God's best. The first place prize in anything does not go to the idle and indifferent, but only to the diligent, and so it is in the search for God's wisdom. In a previous message we have seen that Solomon taught his son he must be receptive, retentive and responsive, or aggressive, and we want to pursue this last one a little further. God must be to us what gold is to the miner, and what wealth is to the miser.

I. DILIGENCE IS DEMANDED.

Solomon says the search for God's wisdom and guidance is to be on a level with the search for silver and hidden treasure. The zeal and passion, and even avarice of the human heart that drives men to face great dangers and expend extra ordinary energy for the sake of treasure is the stand by which our zeal for God is measured. If we put so little value on the riches of God that we will not put forth the effort men put forth for earthly riches, then we are unworthy of receiving them.

The godless man will search and labor for silver and wealth as if it were the ultimate value, and ought not the godly then work for the true ultimate value as if it were silver and wealth? In other words, saved and unsaved people do not differ in their means, but they always differ in their ends. The saved person always has the end of making God and His wisdom first place in life. The unsaved may work just as hard using the same means, but his end is that self may be in first place. The point Solomon is making is, that the believer must exert as least equal energy to attain the knowledge of God as the unbeliever exerts to gain his ambition

of being rich.

This, remember, is not just a wise suggestion, but it is actually a condition that must be fulfilled if one is going to understand the fear of God and find the knowledge of God. Never that knowing God is easy. Like treasure that is hidden it is only found by diligent digging. To expect to know the infinite by being idol or indifferent is to expect the impossible. The knowledge of God belongs only to those who seek for wisdom as the greedy seek for wealth.

It is important to see that our part is to seek and exert the energy in diligent search. It is God's part to see that we find. In the New Testament we are urged to ask and it will be given, to seek and we will find, to knock and it will be opened. It is our duty to ask, seek and knock, but it is God's part to give, reveal and open. Solomon puts the Sovereignty of God and the free will of man together in the same context, as if there were no conflict. The Bible does not have a problem with the reality of both. It is only a problem to systematic theologians who do not want to include both in their system.

In verse 6, just after showing that God demands a diligent search for wisdom, Solomon says that God gives wisdom. How can it be both a reward for diligent effort and also a gift? This is easy to see, for God in His sovereignty has chosen to give the gift of wisdom only to those who diligently search for it. Without a willful commitment of some kind to God there is no channel open by which God's gifts can be given. Even in the New Testament where salvation is freely given through faith in Christ man must will to receive that gift, or he is without hope. Even the song most used to illustrate that man is not saved by anything he does shows that man still has a part. It says, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." The act of clinging to the cross is a choice of the person's will necessary to gain the benefits of the cross. I point this out to show that the theology of the Old and New Testaments are in perfect harmony, for they combine the major truths of both Calvinism and Arminianism.

In the New Testament we say the free gift is not yours until you receive it. Solomon is here saying that the free gift of God's wisdom is not yours until you search for it diligently. Someone has said, "The truth without the search for truth is only half the truth." In other words, the search is a

basic aspect of knowing the truth. It is certainly basic to knowing God. To lack the desire and drive to dig diligently for this treasure is to lack the faculty necessary to recognize it if you did discover it. However much treasure of truth is present, it is not available to those who are without receivers, any more than all the music being transmitted through the air is available to those without a radio to receive it. An attitude of diligent searching is the only antenna that will pick up the treasures of truth being transmitted by God. The New Testament says that in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Notice that they are hid in Him, and that is why it is necessary to search.

The wise men never would have found the Christ child if they had not been diligent and persistent in their search. When the star no longer guided them, they did not give up and go home. They used other means, and they asked questions and sought the help of men. Their diligence was rewarded by the reappearance of the star that led them to the child. This is an historical example of the truth that those who seek shall find. They searched for Christ as men search for silver and hidden treasure. This is the proof that they were indeed wise men. Diligence is demanded in finding any of God's riches, but when the demand is met God will certainly keep His promise, and so we look to verse 5 and see just what it is that will be the result of our diligent search for wisdom.

II. DEITY DISCOVERED.

Here the conclusion of all that has been said in the first 4 verses. Here is the reward and God's part in the cooperative effort of God and His children to arrive at the highest possible use of their lives. If believers fulfill the first 4 verses by being receptive and retentive of wisdom, and are aggressive and diligent in their search for it, God promises that He will be found. "Then we will understand the fear of the Lord." It is not before this, but then we will understand and have reverence and respect for Him, which we have seen is the principle part of knowledge.

The immature and uncommitted cannot be expected to understand what it means to fear God. This is a sign of considerable maturity, for it can only be gained after much reception of wisdom, and diligence search for it. This does not mean the immature cannot be reverent, but it does mean that they do not really grasp the full significance of reverence. It

could well be that reverence for God is a key factor in determining the maturity of a believer. As irreverence is certainly a sign of immaturity, so the opposite is also true. A goal for our lives then in all the diligence search for wisdom is not that we might be proud of our attainment, but that we might be more humbly reverent before God. This goal is that of being Christ like.

If Jesus is the truth, and we believe it, and if in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and we believe that, then the whole Christian life is a process of education whereby we grow in our knowledge of the truth and our practice of wisdom. Someone wrote, "The educated man is one who knows that he is not, and never can be, educated in any final sense, but who has an unquenchable thirst to continue his education."

The second result to come from fulfilling the conditions will be a finding of the knowledge of God. We can literally discover deity in our search for hidden treasure. Discovery of gold cannot compare with this fact, that men can discover God, or more accurately, the knowledge of God. So many people insist on an entirely different approach to finding God. They want to get an understanding of God and then decide if they want to believe or not. God says that He reveals himself only to those who already believe. Only the believer can really gain an understanding of the fear of God and find the knowledge of God. Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century said what has always been true, and always will be: "...I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this too I believe, that unless I believe, I shall not understand." They only find the knowledge of God who have put God in first place in their lives. When God is first place only, then you are being truly educated.

8. GOD-GIVER AND GUARD Based on Prov. 2:6-7

More than once has the story been told by missionaries of how quickly some pagans have responded to the Gospel. An old man in India once responded to the first sermon he ever heard and confessed Christ as

Savior. When the missionary asked him why he said that it was really not a quick reception, but a product of years. He gave this account: “Years ago I gave myself to the task of searching my life. I found it full of imperfection and sin. My sense of guilt was overwhelming. For days and nights I wept bitter tears. At last in an agony of despair I cast myself upon the ground and cried to the Power who brought me into existence to send someone to save me. I cried for mercy and acknowledged my sin. I left, there and then, everything with that Power. I have pictured to myself the one whom that Power would send. When you preach Christ I recognized Him at once. I have been trusting in Jesus Christ for years, but I did not know what to call Him.”

Like the ancient Athenians to whom Paul preached, he worshipped the unknown God, but God did not leave him in ignorance, but gave him light and revelation through the Gospel. This illustrates in a concrete way all that Solomon has said in the first 5 verses of Prov. 2. We have been stressing the importance and necessity of man’s part in attaining God’s best for life. Those who fulfill these conditions will certainly find God’s wisdom. Now that we have considered the conditions, we need to move on with Solomon to consider the consequences and the basis for them. The basis, of course, for all our blessings lies in the very nature of God, so Solomon describes just what God is like and what His attitude is toward those who fulfill the conditions He has laid down.

In verse 6 he says, “For the Lord gives wisdom.” Now let’s put Solomon’s argument into a statement that will clarify all he has been saying. Do your best in seeking wisdom, and God will see to it that you find it, for He is the source of all wisdom and delights to grant it to those who really want it. This means that the wisest people in the world ought to be believers who are children of light, for they have the greatest contact with the source of all wisdom. James says in 1:5, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not, and it shall be given him.” All that is required is that we have the desire for wisdom and ask for it. Since, however, God gives to all men liberally, just as He sends rain to all, and not just to His own children, it remains true what Jesus said, that the children of darkness are wiser in their generation than the children of light. It does not follow that because a person is a Christian that he will automatically be wiser than an unbeliever.

The Lord gives wisdom, but we must never take that statement out of the context where the picture is so clear that it is given only to those who seek it as for hid treasure. If the conditions are not filled a believer may go all through life ignorant and unwise, and very foolish in many areas. He is not lost thereby, but his life is lost as a ideal instrument for God's glory. It may even be that they will be a hindrance to the work of God by the lack of wisdom. The Lord gives wisdom because it is needed to accomplish His will. The Christian is not to be concerned about eternity only, but he is to also be concerned about time. He has an obligation to be the best possible servant for God in this world, and this he can never be without godly wisdom. The ultimate folly is to refuse God's gift of salvation, but it is also foolish to refuse any of God's lesser gifts such as wisdom, knowledge and understanding. Our prayer ought to be that of Boethius,

**Give me unveiled the source of good to see!
Give me thy light, and fix my eyes on thee!**

The second part of the verse says, "An from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." All that is true has its origin in God, and through His mouth it is communicated to man. This, of course, means that it is through His Word. We are to live not by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. That means all of Scripture is valuable, and it is to be a part of our spiritual diet. It I mover slow in my study of God's Word it is because of my conviction that all of it is valuable and ought to be chewed and well digested. The Bible contains knowledge and understanding on many subjects, and the better a person knows it in detail the more he is truly and educated person. There is much knowledge that is not in the Bible, but the person who knows the Bible well is better equipped to gain non-biblical wisdom as well. The Psalmist says in Psa. 119:99, "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditations." It is possible to be one of greater understanding than those who are older if you are filled with the knowledge of God's Word.

In verse 7 he says that he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless. For the Hebrew mind only that which is practical is of any real value. No amount of theological knowledge is of any worth if it does not lead one to walk uprightly. One Jewish scholar says that the truly righteous man will

be the truly wise and practical man. He will not be giving himself to abstract speculation like the Greek mind loves to do, but will be concerned about the practical day by day experience of life and its relationship to God. We are products of the Greek mind as well as the Hebrew mind, and we need to constantly be aware of the danger of losing the balance that comes from stressing one or the other. The New Testament gives us this balance where the two minds are combined.

Paul is more concerned about theological foundations than most of the Old Testament, but he is still always concerned about the practical applications of theology to life. He makes this clear in I Cor. 13:2, “And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so as to remove mountains and have not love, I am nothing.” Wisdom is to recognize that without love you are nothing, but with it you are an instrument of God. God gives wisdom, and He guards from the folly of enemies. Paul did not conceive the idea of the armor of God. The Hebrews often thought of God as their armor and protector. In II Sam. 22 David refers to God as his shield several times. In verse 3 he writes, “My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation.” In verse 31 he writes, “...He is a shield for all those who take refuge in Him.” The Old Testament is filled with this concept of God as shield. One of our well-known hymns says, “Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days, pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.”

There is no greater protection in life than to walk uprightly according to God’s will, for in doing so you place yourself in the care of God. With all the weapons that Satan and the powers of evil have devised to make the saint fall on the battlefield in defeat, there is no other shield adequate for protection but God himself. Solomon knows his son is going to need a shield to save him from the darts of temptation and from bad companions both male and female. We have in this concept of God as our shield the idea of security. The Old Testament believer needed assurance of salvation just as we do in the New Testament. They had it on the same basis. Their security was in God who was their shield. He was a certain and unfailing protection. This was their security. They had all the blessings of the Calvinism idea of eternal security, but they also had all the challenge and responsibility of wise use of their free will as stressed by Arminianism.

God is our guide only if we follow, and He is our shield only if we are walking in the path of righteousness, which He has promised to protect. It is inconceivable to me that anyone could read the Bible and not see the clear demand for man's obedient response before God gives forth His reward. Let us remember, however, that man's response is not the cause for the reward, but only the condition. The cause is none other the sovereign grace of God, who by His very nature wants to be a giver, a guide and a guard to those whom He created in His image and for His glory. The greater our response the greater is His reward of being our guard and guide.

9. THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS based on Prov. 2:8-9

A study of God's nature as just and righteous leads to the conclusion that one of our popular explanations of things is not true. We have all heard the saying that God loves the sinner but hates the sin. It sounds good and seems to be a helpful way of explaining God's attitude to man. It is purely theoretical, however, and it has little practical value, for sin is never distinct and separate from the sinner, and so when God's righteous judgment falls it always falls on the sinner, and not on the sin. There is no way to condemn abstract sin and separate it from the sinner. We only play with words when we say God does not hate the sinner, for by His very nature He must hate the sinner, for the sinner is the source of the sin. Psa. 5:5 says clearly, "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity."

Numerous are the text where God is said to hate, not abstract evil, but the persons embodying that evil. The Jewish mind never cared to consider the abstract, but always the concrete. The result is that the Old Testament does not leave you guessing as to what God loves and hates. Justice and righteousness are the practical manifestations of God's holiness in relation to His creatures. Righteousness is more subjective, and it is what one is in him self, while justice is more objective and is what one is in relation to others. Psa. 97:2 says, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." They become absolute essentials in God's relationship to man and in His revelation to man.

As justice, God is bound to punish the unjust. There can be no arbitrary action on the part of God, and He cannot require less from men. They must do justice or be themselves unjust and subject to His just judgment. The mercy and grace of God do not change this at all, for His mercy always works justly, and even in the great act of redemption through Christ not a single sin escaped, but all were laid on Christ. God is just and eternally so, and so this becomes a major aspect of our knowledge of God. It is an absolute, for there is nothing optional about it. We sometimes get the impression that Jesus did away with the strict requirements of justice and righteousness, but this is not so. He said that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees we could not enter the kingdom of God. The New Testament Gospel of salvation by grace through faith does not in the least lower the requirements for just and righteous living.

What Solomon says here to his son is as true and relevant to us as New Testament believers. In verse 8 he writes, "For he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones." This is a continuation of his showing his son what security there is in walking uprightly. He gives a clear impression that God and man must be a team or the game of life will never be won. God's canopy of protecting grace does not cover the way of the world. It does not guard the path of iniquity and injustice. If you walk in those paths you are subject to all the dangers of Satan and other evil forces, and also the danger of God's just wrath. God is no respecter of persons. If His own transgress, even though He loves them, they must suffer judgment.

What this means for practical every day life is that the believer must always be on the right side of justice. David Crockett said, "Be sure you are right, then go ahead." Henry Clay said, "I would rather be right than be president." This must be the attitude of every believer. Nothing less than truth and justice is Christian. Any good pagan can be just, but the believer must be just or he walks where God does not guarantee to protect him. F. W. Faber wrote,

**For right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win.
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.**

In every issue of life the believer has only one question to answer to determine the will of God, and that is, what is right and just? Not, what is the majority for, or what is best for the majority, or what is best for me and my group, but what is just? Justice takes precedence over all other considerations. Addison said, "Justice discards party, friendship, kindred, and is therefore always represented as blind." Objectivity is essential to true justice, and this has its biblical base in the fact that God is represented as being impartial and without respect of persons. Woe to the person who thinks he has enough pull in heaven to sin without being judged, and woe to the Christian who thinks being a child of God will make it easier on him if he follows the path of injustice. The Christian ought to be the greatest example in the world of impartial justice, which is free from all prejudice.

Prov. 18:5 says, "To respect the person of the wicked and be partial, so as to deprive the righteous of justice is not good." It is not mercy to let the wicked off if in so doing the innocent are deprived of justice. This is not mercy, but injustice. In Prov. 18:13 we get another basic proverb to guide in doing justice. "He who answers a matter before he hears the facts, it is folly and shame to him." This is the biblical equivalent to our American standard of justice, which says that a person is innocent until proven guilty. It is always an act of injustice to make a decision without the facts. Seneca, the pagan, even had this standard: "He who decides a matter without hearing the other side, though he decides justly, cannot be considered just." In other words, if you are right by chance and not by facts you are still unjust. Cicero said, "Let us remember that justice must be observed even to the lowest." Impartiality in justice is a standard of the natural man.

This leads me to the conclusion that whatever is not just is not only non-Christian, but anti-Christian, for it falls below the level reached even by the unregenerate pagan. Doing justice and being just is a necessary requirement to claim the promise of the security and protection of God. An unjust Christian is a contradiction in terms. The question, of course, is this: How can we be sure even after an impartial review of both sides of an issue that we are choosing the right and just course? Verse 9 tells us that this comes as a result of a diligent search for God's wisdom. All goes back to the original requirements that Solomon laid down. Those basic requirements are those of being receptive, retentive, responsive, and

aggressive in our search for wisdom. All is built on this same foundation. The more solid the foundation the higher we build, and the stronger we grow in all godly virtues.

Verse 9 says, "Then you will understand what is right and just and fair-every good path." Notice that there is more than one good path. Psalm 23 refers to being led the paths of righteousness. God's will and way is manifold and various. There are a number of ways to follow in being righteous and just, and the more we walk the better and broader will be our experience in fellowship with God and other saints. This is saying to me that the believer ought to be involved in many areas of life that provide paths for doing what is just. Wherever justice is done there should be believers involved. The very security of nations depends on the reign of justice, and to leave it to the unbeliever is not only poor stewardship before God, it is poor patriotism, for it surrenders the future of the nation to the control of those who can be easily led to bring the wrath of God upon the nation.

It is only because justice is a natural virtue, and capable of being practiced by the unbeliever, that we have any hope at all in being rightly governed by any except Christians. The pagan Romans built up a wonderful system of justice that even served the cause of Christ, and saved the Apostle Paul, but it did not last because of the corruption and depravity of the men who administered it. The same thing happened to the Jews before they were carried away captive due to the judgment of God. In justice spell certain doom for any nation, and so those who preserve and promote justice are the greatest of patriots.

Because these things are understood only after one has diligently sought and persistently pursued the wisdom of God, it follows that we must often look to those who are more mature in the Lord for guidance in areas of which we have little or no knowledge. Young Christians must learn to determine the reliability of authority. It is important to know the man and his experience with Christ and his subject before you accept his authority. John Boyle O'Reilly wrote,

**What man would be wise, let him drink of the river
That bears on his bosom the record of time;
A message to him every wave can deliver**

To teach him to creep till he knows how to climb.

Solomon did not expect his son to be wise by receiving his teaching, but only after he had obeyed it. Nor will any of you arrive at this goal of understanding until you begin to creep along the paths of righteousness, gaining strength and wisdom until you can climb to the heights of the mountain of righteousness and justice.

10. GOD'S USE OF MEANS Based on Prov. 2:10-14

Unlike many chapters of the Proverbs, chapter 2 is a complete unity. It is a chain of reasoning that follows a consistent pattern from start to finish. We have considered the foundation and several of the stories built on it, and now we have arrived at the top where we see the practical goal and reason for all that has gone before. In verse 9 Solomon said that by fulfilling the conditions of a diligent search for God's wisdom his son would come to a point of righteousness, justice, equity and every good path. He says that if you fulfill the conditions then wisdom will come into your heart. This is why you will know what is right, just and good. You will not need a set of rules to go by, for it will be a part of your very being. It will be imbedded in your heart.

The Old Testament saint could gain the same inner insurance and leading of God as those in the New Testament. The only difference being that God used different means. The New Testament saint is guided by the Holy Spirit, but the Old Testament saint is guided by wisdom. This means that one of the basic differences between the Old Testament and New Testament is that the New Testament is far more personal in the relationship of God and man. God still uses the means here to guide, but we refer to the person of the Holy Spirit as the one making the means effective. The Old Testament said had a great salvation, and a wonderful relationship to God. Not only is the heart filled with wisdom here, but the soul is filled with joy in knowledge. Knowledge will be pleasant to the mature and godly man. It is no accident that Jews have produced so many mighty men of the mind. They have high educational standards.

Unfortunately, not all Christians are aware of this great heritage from the Old Testament, and many have assumed that love of knowledge is some sort of worldliness. In reality, the greatest method of overcoming worldliness is to make knowledge pleasant to your soul. When you once discover the fun and thrill there is in knowing the truth, you will lament every hour you wasted in the silly pleasures of the world. Next to the lost the ignorant are most to be pitied. What loss can be so sad as to lose one's love of learning? Any believer who does not desire to grow in wisdom and knowledge is in real need of revival. To have a mind that does not hunger and thirst for knowledge is to break the greatest of all commandments. Jesus said in Matt. 22:37, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." All believers differ in capacity, but God demands the full capacity of your mind in His service. It is seldom thought of as a sin to be anti-intellectual, but the Bible certainly implies that it is.

Every believer is to be a philosopher, which is a love of wisdom, and no field of learning is so vast and exciting as that of biblical wisdom. For 3 months after I committed my life to Christ I got on my knees by my bed and asked God for knowledge, wisdom and understanding. I felt God wanted me in the ministry, but I was such a poor student, and so slipshod at study that I doubted if I could make it. College always scared me, and I never even considered it until I sense the call to the ministry. I needed some proof that God could use me, and so every night I prayed with a sense of desperation. There has never been a prayer in my life so clearly answered as that, and it left me with no doubt as to my call. Knowledge became so pleasant to my soul that I went from a C and D student to straight A's, and it wasn't even work, it was fun. God forbid that we get the idea, however, that this is only for those going into the ministry. Every layman has the same obligation to love God with all his mind. Certainly it is the goal of every believer to come to the point where knowledge is pleasant to the soul.

In verse 11 Solomon goes on to indicate other blessings, which will result from diligent search for God's wisdom. Discretion will protect you. Discretion is the power of free choice, and the power to discern and decide what is proper. The discrete person always acts in good manners. This was so important to the oriental people who make so much of manners, but it is to be important to us as well. All the education in the world will be

ineffective if you do not have the discretion to guide you in your use of it. Increased knowledge can lead to greater blunders without discretion to watch over you and guide you on the right path. Someone said, he is wise who knows what not to say providing he doesn't say it.

He goes on to say understanding will guard you. In verses 7 and 8 Solomon said that God gives wisdom and He is the guard of the righteous, and now he attributes the same things to discretion and understanding. He is making it obvious that God works through means. He refers to God's acting directly so there could be no doubt as the source of wisdom and protection, but then he goes on to show what means God uses to guide and protect. These means will give the righteous the power to distinguish in matters of conflicting interest, and then be able to choose the best. Lord Brougham wrote, "Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave." This describes what the believer ought always to be.

In verse 12 he tells us just how wisdom will protect us. It will save us from the ways of wicked men. Intelligence comes from 2 words. Inter meaning between, and legre meaning to choose. So to be intelligent is to be able to choose between. The sign of Christian intelligence is the ability to choose the right way as over against the way of evil. The greater the wisdom, the greater the ability to discern between good and evil. The immature do not see the difference and so often walk in the way of folly not seeing the danger. Most foolish sins of the believer are due to lack of discretion.

Because discretion and understanding are means that are possible to be used by the unbeliever also, we see how it is possible for a pagan to set up a system of ethics that protects him from the follies of man's sinful nature. Education and wisdom cannot save and bring a man into relationship with God, but the facts of history and life compel us to recognize that even unregenerate man can be lifted to a higher level of ethical living by being taught the principles of God's plan for life. Christian ethics has played a major role in the founding of our nation, and so millions of unbelievers have been kept from paths of evil they certainly would have followed without the influence of Christian teaching. It is important to see this, for it shows us clearly what it means for believers to be the light and salt of the earth. It also ought to frighten us to remember

that if the salt ceases to work it is good for nothing and will be cast out. If Christians in America cease to have any effect on the moral and ethical lives of its citizens, there can be no doubt the judgment will begin at the house of God.

As individuals we must each strive to gain the wisdom of God so as to be personally able to discern and escape the way of evil, and be an example to those around us of the superiority of a life lived in obedience to God. Solomon says we will be saved from the man whose words are perverse. This is as great a danger in one age as another. Evil is always promoted through speech. America is filled with propaganda and perversions of every kind, and without discretion and understanding almost every student who goes on to college will be snared by one perverted voice or another.

Justin said, "By examining the tongue of a patient, a physician finds out the disease of the body and philosophers, those of the mind." A man reveals all he is by his use of the tongue. Listen to a man talk and you can determine much of his personality. A man reveals in his speech his values and attitudes in life. He reveals his goals and purpose for living, and the philosophy that guides him. Evil in the heart can first be spotted on the tongue. The sinner gives himself away every time he opens his mouth. One of the greatest tests of a man's conversion is the use he makes of his tongue. The unsaved, for the sake of position and manners, can often control their tongue to a great degree, but almost always reveal in his speech their shallow concept of God and the things revealed by God.

Perverted speech comes from the Hebrew word meaning to turn upside down. It consists of willful misrepresentation of the truth. This can be done without the means that God has ordained to guide the believer. The believer will be in danger of being duped and lead astray by subtle perversions. You can see how important this whole chapter is for every day life and guidance. Solomon has a pattern so necessary that to miss it, and not begin to build your life according to it, is to reject or ignore God's means of using your whole life and mine for His glory. You leave yourself open for attack, and are in danger of following the evil man whom He says in verse 13, "Forsakes the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness.

Note that Solomon is referring to one who was a Jew who apparently had the teaching necessary to guide him, but he forsook it. It is clearly revealed that within the body of the chosen people there were those who rejected God and His revelation, and often they became the dominate group, and they led the whole nation astray. The history of the church, which is the New Israel, reveals the same pattern. The danger is always from within. Whenever the people of God forsake the paths of righteousness and begin to walk in darkness, they break down all fellowship with God, and the only alterative then is repentance or judgment. There are those today within the frame work of Christianity who are forsaking the paths of righteousness, and are like those in verse 14 who rejoice to do evil. Men are tearing down the whole fabric of Christian morality, and they are doing so with pleasure. God will impart to us, however, the necessary wisdom to avoid all the errors around us.

Solomon does not limit the danger to men of perverted speech, but he warns also of the danger of the strange woman, or loose woman. Solomon failed to follow his own wisdom and was ensnared by the alien women he married. They led him into idolatry and perversions of all kinds. He knew from experience the danger of being led by flattering lips and smooth words. Again, the tongue becomes that agent of evil. Christian youth need ears that are committed to God and that are able to discern between truth and error.

Henry Ward Beecher wrote, "If the frequency of warning against any sin measures the liability of man to that sin, then none is worse than impurity." Every believer must be consciously aware of the danger of being deceived by words and beauty. Beecher again wrote, "When our passions enchant us, how beautiful is the way to death." Strong Jewish teaching and warning led the Hebrews to survive in spite of the great temptations that led both Greek and Roman culture to destruction. The Jews were very frank in their warning to youth. Plout, the Jewish scholar, said, "Vague allusions and embarrassed similes are worst than useless."

Solomon does not beat around the bush. He denounces the woman who forsakes her husband and God's covenant. He warns that to be partner with her in her evil course by having sexual relations with her is to commit your self to the path of darkness and death. Those who forsake the path of purity for her get on a path so steep heading downward that they

cannot return to the high level of righteousness even if they try. The habit of lust is like a chain dragging them into the abyss of death. A girl in a white dress asked the coal miner if she could go into the mine with her white dress on. He said she could but it would be very difficult for her to be wearing a white dress out again. There is no way to follow the path of lust and keep unspotted from the world. Wise are those who listen to Solomon and stay on the path of purity.

11. DO NOT FORGET Based on Prov. 3:1-2

Virgil, the ancient poet, describes the river Lethe as flowing through a tranquil landscape, and on its banks wandered a countless multitude who drank of its waters which washed away all memory of the past. This would seem to be an ideal situation for sinful creatures like we are, for we are constantly blundering and falling short of the glory of God. If we could just drink from the Lethe River and forget the passed, we could begin life fresh with every drink instead of living with the guilt and regrets of our former failures.

It is a known fact that it is the burdens of the past that cause so much anxiety and frustration in life. The inability to forget can lead some people to become nervous wrecks. Most of us have this problem to some degree, and we look back and worry about why we said this, or why we did that. We wish we had done things different. We go over every detail and let our memory of the past rob the present of its peace. At times like this a drink from Lethe would be welcome, for we know we cannot change what was, and there is no sense to fret about it. As the proverb says, there is no use crying over spilt milk. An unknown poet wrote,

There's many a trouble would break like a bubble,
And into the waters of Lethe depart,
Did we not rehearse it, and tenderly nurse it,
And give it a permanent place in our heart.

There's many a sorrow would vanish tomorrow,
Were we not unwilling to furnish it wings;

**So sadly intruding, and quietly brooding,
It hatches all sorts of horrible things.**

There is no doubt about it, a real river of Lethe could come in handy. The only problem is that it would soon be discovered to be a curse, for although the past can hold much to burden our life, it also holds much to bless life. If in order to forget the evil we must also sacrifice the memory of the good, the cost is too great. For every believer, the foundation has already been laid in the past, and there is none other that can be laid. That is why Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and said, "Do this in remembrance of me." If we ever forget the past and what Jesus did for us on the cross, then we have no future. All that we build in the present and hope for in the future is based on the work of Christ in the past. What is true on this highest level is true on the lesser levels as well.

To build well in this life we must remember the past instructions and warnings. Memory is a must to men of maturity, for he who forgets is as bad off as he who never knew. Solomon is aware of all this, and so he begins in chapter 3 with a plea to his son not to forget. All that has gone before is for nothing if he does not remember it, and Solomon certainly knew enough about the history of his people to know their tendency to forget. The Old Testament is filled with examples of blessings turned to curses because of forgetfulness. In Deut. 32:18 Moses rebuked the people for going after other gods, and he said, "You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth." It sounds unbelievable, but the whole history of Israel is a record of God's battle to keep His chosen people in remembrance of Him. They were urged to diligently teach their children, and to observe great holidays like the Passover in order that the past might never be forgotten. The mighty acts of God in the past were to be the foundation for their future. They were to look back to their deliverance out of Egypt for the same reason we are to constantly look back to our deliverance on the cross.

Warnings are everywhere telling the people not to forget. Duet. 6:12 says, "Then take heed lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." Again in 8:11 we read, "Take heed lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes, which I command you this day." In 8:19 he gives this solemn warning, "And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods

and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you this day that you shall surely perish." After all this we look ahead to see what happens. In Judges 3:7 we read, "And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, forgetting the Lord their God." Imagine people forgetting their God. A poor memory is common to many, but who can forget their God? It is inconceivable, and yet it is recorded over and over again.

I Sam. 12:9, "But they forgot the Lord their God."

Psa. 106:21, "They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt."

Isa. 17:10, "For you have forgotten the God of your salvation."

Jer. 2:32, God complains, "My people have forgotten me days without number."

This same thing is going on today, and many nations are forgetting their Christian heritage, and many professing Christians are forgetting that the foundation of the church is Jesus. There are men of God today who are experiencing that which Isaiah, Jeremiah and other prophets experienced in their ministry to the chosen people. They preached to deaf ears and blinded eyes, and confessed that they preached to a people who have forgotten their God. It has happened before and it can happen again and bring the judgment of God. All of this background is just to point out the significance of the way Solomon addresses his son when he writes, "My son forget not my law."

If people can forget their God, they can certainly forget any knowledge and wisdom they have received. In fact, they are experts at it. The average person has the capacity to forget 80% of what he has learned in 48 hours. If we could remember all we hear and read we would all be brilliant. A youth brought up to the teen years through Sunday school would be a biblical scholar. There's hardly any doubt about it that we would never go wrong if we could always remember our biblical teaching. This may seem like an unrealistic ideal, as fictitious as the Lethe River, but it must be our goal. Solomon urged his son not to forget because memory of what is learned is absolutely essential. A good memory is a necessity in getting good grades, and in being an obedient child, and also in being an effective servant of Christ. You can't go wrong by improving your memory.

Forgetfulness is the father to much folly. The little boy who eats so much ice cream until he gets sick forgets the sickness he has suffered and has to endure it all over again the next time he gets to eat ice cream. The drinker so soon forgets the misery of the hangover and so foolishly continues to seek happiness in a bottle. The student so soon forgets the frustration of letting school work pile up to the last minute, and so they repeat the same thing over and over, and each time saying, "I'll never do this again."

If you remember what we have studied in the first two chapters you would be well on your way to a life of real joy for the glory of God. The more I think of it the more I realize the biggest waste in the world is the amount of truth that is proclaimed from God's Word that never stays in the memory long enough to effect a change in the life. This leads me to even stronger convictions on the value of taking notes on all you hear and read. The very reason Solomon put his teaching in writing, and the reason God inspired all the biblical authors to write is that they might be, "Profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

If we could remember it all, we would be perfect and thoroughly furnished unto all good works. You would never go wrong if you could only remember, and so this plea of Solomon to his son is not just an opening verse of transition, which is of little consequence. Unless we take it seriously and recognize it as fundamental we will be poor stewards of what we gain. Remembrance is the key to successful Christian living just as it was the key to godly living in the Old Testament.

Solomon is speaking to his son whom he has already taught. It is obvious that you cannot forget what you never knew. The first thing is to gain the knowledge and be taught, but then it must not be forgotten if it is to be of value. The more a person forgets the more it is evident there is a lack of commitment. We habitually forget what we are not interested in and committed to. A poor memory of God's will and teaching is a sign of a bad heart rather than merely a bad head. Solomon says, "But keep my commands in your heart." In other words, this is the opposite of forgetting. If the commandments are in the heart, they will not be forgotten. What the heart holds controls the life, and when godly

principles and truth control one's life the result will be as Solomon says in verse 2, "For they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity." It is obvious that Solomon had no such superstition about people dying because their number was up. This fatalism is not biblical. The wisdom of God and obedience to it can make a great difference in the length of one's life, and the quality of it as well as the quantity of it.

Almost everyone agrees that a long life is a blessing, and Solomon says that remembering plays a role in the length of life. This is repeated several times in Proverbs. In verse 16 he says, "Long life is in her right hand..." He is referring to wisdom, and in 4:10 he says that if his son will listen to what he says the years of his life will be many. Again he says in 9:11, "For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life." In 10:27 he says, "The fear of the Lord adds length to life..." Not only is the study of Proverbs good for the soul, but it is good for the body, and by obeying its precepts one can even add to his physical life. The Jews stress this more than we do as Christians. Death has lost its sting because of Christ's resurrection, and so no longer is a short life as great a sorrow as it was for those who lived before Christ.

In the Old Testament the patriarchs lived to a ripe old age and died in peace giving their blessing to their children. This was the ideal in the Old Testament, but in New Testament this is no longer stressed. It is still true, however that a godly life is likely to be a longer life. Statistical studies indicate longer life for those who do not drink, smoke, and who avoid all the bad habits of the world. Christians do die young just as many in the Old Testament did, but all things being equal, the believer will outlive the unbeliever because holiness is a part of health, and it will preserve life. Jesus died young, but had He been able to live out His life He, no doubt would have lived to be very old because of His perfect adjustment to all of life, and perfect obedience to God.

There is a story of an old woman who walked the streets of Strasbourg in the 14th century carrying a pail of water in one hand and a torch in the other. When she was asked why she was doing it she replied, "With the water I want to put out the flames of hell, and with the torch I want to burn up heaven so that in the future men will love the dear Lord God for Himself alone and not out of fear of hell or out of craving for reward." It sounds like a great ideal, but it is as unrealistic as the Lethe River of

forgetfulness. When our ideals rise above the Word of God they are foolish and based on a total misconception of God and man. In both the Old and New Testaments we are told that godliness is profitable for this life and the life to come. All through the Bible are warnings of loss of reward and promises of gain of reward. The fact that we must never forget is that we cannot go wrong for time or eternity if we will remember what we learned of God's truth and keep it in our hearts.

12. A BROKEN CRUTCH Based on Prov. 3:5-6

A social science teacher once told my sister that faith in God was only a crutch. My sister asked me how to answer that, and my immediate response was to deny it and tell her she doesn't know what she is talking about. As I reflected more, however, I recognized that though it was meant as a slam, it really was a statement that could be used for the defense of the faith. After all, a crutch is not evil. It is a device of service that enables people who would otherwise be helpless to walk about. If something is a crutch, it is of value for many, and that is just the case with faith in God.

Man is a moral cripple, and he cannot stand alone. If he does not have a crutch supplied by God he would be doomed to be a moral invalid forever. In this light then, calling faith in God a crutch is a compliment. It should be made even stronger by saying that faith in God is the crutch. It is the only one that will enable man to walk in the path he was made to walk in. Man has tried to find meaning to life, and he has tried to get onto a path of light with other crutches, but everything he leans on breaks and plunges him into a pit of paralysis. Man's choice is not between having a crutch, or no crutch, but between having one that holds him up, or a broken one. Solomon in verses 5 and 6 is counseling his son to lean on the good and solid crutch of faith in God, and to not put his weight on the broken crutch of his own understanding. We want to consider the positive and negative of this advice.

I. ABSOLUTE TRUST IN GOD.

You can't ask for a stronger statement on faith than this. Faith, when it is true faith, is identical with trust. Faith that stops short of trust is neither saving nor sanctifying faith. The devils believe in God and tremble, but they do not trust in Him. Christian faith, as Old Testament faith, is trust or it is nothing. To know and not trust is of no value. To believe in all the orthodox doctrines and creeds of Christendom is of no value if one does not trust in the Lord. This was true in the Old Testament as well. The Old Testament saint had to put his trust in God or he would have no fellowship and sense of personal guidance. Judaism was not just a matter of law as God revealed it. We must distinguish between biblical Judaism and historical Judaism. Many kept all the laws, but their heart was far from God, and God despises such formal obedience to ritual. God has never been pleased with anything less than personal trust. This is the message of both Testaments. God wants no half-hearted trust. He wants all your weight leaning on the everlasting arms.

Notice the stress on the person of God. It is trust in the Lord, and not in the law, or Moses, or anyone else. Acknowledge Him as present in all your ways. This may seem like commonplace truth, but it is something we need to be constantly reminded of. So many Christians, like Jews of old, have gone off the narrow path without being conscious of it because they transfer their trust from the person of God to some other value. It is a very subtle process, but it is possible for one to get into a state where the means becomes the end, and the end is forgotten. One can be so attached to the 23rd Psalm, or some other portion of Scripture, that you are really saying that this is your Shepherd rather than the Lord. All Scripture, theology and methods of worship are to lead us to trust in the Lord, and not become, in them selves, the chief object of our trust.

Our trust is to be absolute, and in all our ways we are to acknowledge Him, and not just in those ways in which it is convenient. We have a tendency to recognize God's presence at worship and Bible study, but there is no such limitation into that here. An ancient Rabbi, Bar Kappara, said that this text, "Is the succinct text upon which all the essential principles of Judaism may be considered to hinge." We have in this text Judaism at its best in a nutshell, and it fits perfectly into the framework of Christianity. It is a summary of the personal and perpetual nature of a redeemed man's relationship with God.

We are to count God in on all we do, and lean on His arm for guidance. There is nothing in life that is to be done as if He was not a part of it and concerned about it. You can have no double life where God is Lord in one area called sacred, and then you run the show in another area called secular. God is to be the acknowledged One in everything. This calls for conscience effort on our part. We must cultivate the practice of the presence of God. Do not be discouraged at failure, for this is to refuse to run a race because you cannot start at the finish line. Persist in seeking to recognize God in all your ways, and in time you will be greatly rewarded, for as the text says, "For He will direct or make plain, or make straight your paths." He will give providential guidance and go before you to smooth out some rough spots. Youth needs this assurance for they are most likely easy to be led on paths that lead to much sorrow. If you trust in the Lord, you will be able to say with Dr. Horton-

**When in the slippery paths of youth,
With heedless steps I ran,
Thine arm unseen conveyed me safe,
And led me up to man.**

Another poet expresses the cry of the youth in trial and assures them of God's promise. "Finding, following, keeping, struggling is He sure to bless? Saints, Apostles, prophets, martyrs answer yes!" We have God's promise and the multitude of historical examples to back it up. Why play around with broken crutches when absolute trust in God alone will support you and guide you into the paths best for time and eternity. Now we want to consider the negative advice of Solomon to his son.

II. ABSTAIN FROM TRUST IN HIS OWN UNDERSTANDING.

Pascal said, "There is light enough for those who wish to see, and darkness enough to confound those who trust themselves." Self-sufficiency is a broken crutch that so many lean on to their own hurt and destruction. No person is truly educated if he does not have a sense of his own inadequacy. He can know very little who thinks he knows all. On most issues of a complex nature we must just trust in the Lord and not lean on our understanding. For example, on the matter of when does a child pass from the age of innocence to the age of responsibility so that if he dies he will be lost if he has not accepted Christ? There is no one who is able to

give an answer to that with full assurance. We can only trust God to do what is just, and then do our part to reach youth at every age for Christ.

We must learn that there are many matters that are to be left to God, for certainly omniscience should know something that is not known to our finite minds. In all the areas of mystery we need not lean on human understanding, but simply trust that if it would have made any basic difference God would have revealed and answer. Because He didn't, we can leave the matter in His hands. But Solomon is not talking here only about mysteries of life. He is talking primarily about the decisions of life. In all thy ways acknowledge Him means in education, vocation, marriage etc. Do not make these decisions based on your own understanding alone.

Thomas Fuller said, "Trust not a great weight to a slender thread." You can't afford to run your own life. Many young people feel they are capable of making their own decisions, and so they rely the broken crutch of their own mind. You need to recognize, your understanding is affected by prejudice, selfishness, rebellion, ambition, and all sorts of factors that make it unreliable as a final authority. To lean on your own understanding when you can trust in the Lord is like lighting a candle in the noonday sun to light your way. The Chinese say, "Self-sufficient, self-mistaken." You must have a source of guidance outside of yourself because man's very nature leads him to be his own worst enemy if he leans wholly on himself.

In Jer. 9:23-24 we read, "Thus says the Lord. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and honors me, that I am the Lord who practiced kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight says the Lord." All our trust is to be in God, for He is adequate for all needs and all situations. All other things will fail you and prove to be broken crutches.

Solomon has spent a lot of time drilling it into his son how important wisdom, understanding and discretion are, but he gives a balancing truth here that will keep all this from going to his head. All of this is good, and to be sought, but he says don't ever consider it anything but a means. God alone is the object of our trust, and the source of all our wisdom. Do not

be so foolish as to take the gift and forget the giver by whose power and guidance the gift will be useful. He who forgets the source of understanding, and relies on that gift alone is like the story of the village idiot who was given the job of shining the cannon in the park. It was a happy arrangement because it kept him busy and out of trouble, and it made him feel he was making a contribution to the city. Every day he would shine that cannon and keep it spotless, but after some time he appeared before the city council and announced that he was quitting. They were amazed and asked him why he would even consider such a move. He explained that he had saved up enough money to buy his own cannon and go into business for himself. It looked to him like a real move ahead, but, of course, he was relying on his own understanding, which was totally inadequate to recognize the folly of his plan.

They are equally foolish who feel they are infallible and can take their God-given gifts and run their life without looking to the author and giver of those gifts. They, like the idiot, are cutting themselves off from the source of their well being. They are letting go of the only crutch that can support a crippled creature through this life on the paths of righteousness. They are taking up a broken crutch that will surely let them down. Since all young people go through this stage where they tend to feel they are infallible, it is of the utmost importance that each learns this advice by memory, and that they repeat it often-"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not on thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

13. BRIDGING THE GAP OR CHRIST IN THE WORKPLACE 12:1-14

I haven't always worn a suit to work. A couple of days after I married Lavonne I got my first job in working my way through college. It was at the John Morrell Meat Packing Plant In Sioux Falls, South Dakota. After a summer of that we went off to Bethel and I got a number of jobs. I worked in a Battery Factory, the St. Paul Foundry, Curtis 1000 Printing Company, and in between these major jobs I did a number of custodial jobs. In every case they were dirty jobs and I spent a good portion of my educational years with a variety of messiness. I pulled the toenails off

from pigs for a while. I pulled thousands of batteries apart and had holes in my clothes all the time because of the acid that would splash on me. I worked so close to a foundry blast furnace where everybody was a mass of soot for 8 to 10 hours a day. The dirt clung to you so that you looked more black than white. I had my hands in printers ink for 4 years and seldom to never did I have it all clean from under my nails.

I had a lot of dirty jobs in those years, but I learned that the work place is a place where Christians can grow, and where their witness can make a difference. Only once did I have the privilege of leading a fellow worker to Christ on the job, but I had many opportunities to share my faith. I discovered that Christian convictions are a whole lot easier to have on Sunday in the church than on Monday at work. For 4 years I worked with a boss who was an atheist. He rejected the Bible and the Christian perspective on life. For 5 days a week I worked with this man. He did me more good than many of my professors and pastors because he forced me to defend my convictions, and to make them relevant in the real world of the work place.

My struggle to bridge the gap between Sunday and Monday changed my whole perspective on life and made me a skeptical Christian. I mean this in a good sense. I became skeptical of easy and pat answers that Christians spout off that do not fit the reality of people's everyday lives. Working with people of all different backgrounds and convictions made me realize that we often let our narrow experience of life shape our theology and limit God to our puny perspective. One of the best things the work place did for me was to make the world a bigger place. It forced me to broaden my perspective. If Christianity is to be relevant it must enable the Christian to learn how to work with all kinds of people, and do it in such a way that they are accepted as part of the team. In other words, you have to be accepted by your fellow workers as a person before they will have any interest in accepting your witness for Christ.

Your work and your witness are not two separate things. They are one because your work is the foundation to your witness. Poor work, or poor working relationships will so undermine your witness that it will be basically workless in its impact. Paul says in Col. 3:17, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Paul says the Christian

life consists in what you say and what you do. Prov. 12:14 is saying the same thing: "From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things as surely as the work of his hands rewards him." Words and work are the two means whereby we experience the good life. The Old Testament agree that the two key elements for success in bridging the gap between our worship and our workplace will be our words and our work, or what we say and what we do.

These are the two tracks on which the train of Christian living make progress into the secular world. If you do and say the right and wise things you will be able to transfer the truth of Sunday into the workplace on Monday. If any changes are going to take place, and if you are going to let Christ transform your daily work, you need to focus on these two things. Let's first consider-

I. OUR WORK.

Solomon says the work of our hands is what rewards us. Everything about life that we enjoy and praise God for comes to us by means of work. Our homes, possessions, churches, schools, cities, stores and roads all come by work. Even the treasures of nature are ours because God worked for 6 days in creating it all, and then gave man the intelligence to know how to use nature, and by work get out of it all that He built into it. Work is of the very essence of life. It is not called labor for nothing that leads to the birth of a child. We only have life and the gift of children by means of work.

Reality as we know it began with God working, and the first thing God did with Adam is give him a job. We think of paradise as a vacation, but for Adam it was a vocation. Gen. 2:15 says, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." There was no unemployment in this perfect world. God made man to work. The fall made work harder and less productive, but work is not the curse. Work was part of the blessing of man in his perfection, and it will be a part of his eternal relation to God. Man is made in the image of God with the capacity to think and reason, and so he can figure out how energy can be used in such a way as to take raw material and create what is new and beneficial.

Jesus came into this world to be worker with wood. He created things by work, and He left us an example that dignifies manual labor. William Torrent wrote, "My Master was a worker, With daily work to do, And he that would be like Him, Must be a worker too." It is Christ-like to work and to create. Jesus chose men to be His disciples who were part of the labor force of His day. They all had jobs they had to leave. Jesus did not go to those who were idle and unemployed to choose His disciples. He called those from their occupation to follow Him. Jesus wanted workers, for His task of reaching this world was going to take work. In John 5:17 Jesus said, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working." What the world needs is Christian workers who can see how their work fits into the plan of God to use work to reach the world.

The workplace is one of the key areas of life for Christians to build relationships with the world. On Sunday we build relationships with Christians and develop the family of God ties, but Monday through Friday we have opportunity to build relationships with the world. The workplace is our experience of the incarnation. Jesus was in heavenly glory, but He came to be a man and worker in the midst of worldly people. So we must leave the shelter of the Christian environment and descend into the world of the workplace where there is foul language dirty stories, and exposure to all that is secular.

How can we make a difference? How can we be the salt and the light? The first step is by our work. The Christian has to be a good worker to have any chance to be a good witness. The Christian who is lazy and shirks their fair share of the load will be considered a joke if they try to witness for Christ. Your work itself has to be your first witness. If people you work with do not respect you for the job you do, they will not have respect for any belief you have. If your beliefs do not benefit them first by giving them a helpful co-worker, you can forget making any positive impression on them with your words. Your actions will speak so loud they won't hear what you say.

When the Christian can see that the job they do is the key to a good witness, then Christ will be able to transform their daily work, for they will then be able to see that their work itself is a tool for witness. I found that if I did a better than average job, even when I didn't like what I had to do, it opened up doors of opportunity for me to witness. Doing a poor

job at anything is not a very effective witness for Christ. There are so many jobs that have to be done that are not glamorous, fun or meaningful. They are just jobs that have to be done and it is hard to link them in any way with the glory of God. It seems almost demeaning to link God in any way with such lowly tasks.

I think of the humorous event in the life of C. S. Lewis, which he shared in a letter to his brother. He wrote, "I was going into town one day and had got as far as the gate when I realized that I had odd shoes on, one of them clean and the other dirty. There was no time to go back. As it was impossible to clean the dirty one, I decided that the only way of making myself look less ridiculous was to dirty the clean one." Imagine, here is one of the world's most distinguished professors and world famous Christian authors, and he is trying to get his clean shoe dirty so it would match his other dirty one. I doubt if Lewis was thinking of the glory of God as he labored on this trivial task. He was thinking only of his own image and of the embarrassment of looking foolish. But this trivial event calls attention to the fact that all of life's tasks do add or detract from the glory of God by making us either acceptable to others, or rejected by others."

Everything we do on the job, however trivial, makes us more or less acceptable. It either helps us to build relationships, or tear them apart. If our work meets with approval we have a better chance of having our words of witness listened too. The point is, if we are not better workers and more helpful to the team for being Christians, why should anyone be impressed with being a Christian? If the atheist does a better job, and if the humanist is more cooperative, and if the non-church person is a better encourager of others, why is anybody going to be listening to a Christian who is more interested in being critical and self-righteous than in being a team player?

The same goes for a Christian in business. If it is not better to work for you because you are a Christian, why should anyone be impressed by the fact that you are a Christian? If non-Christian bosses and employers treat people better why should anyone be eager to know what you tick? Instead, they will be ticked at you, and probably feel that you use your religious convictions to justify your sub-Christian behavior. The best basis for a witness for Christ in the workplace is doing a job in such a way that

those who work with you will like you as a fellow worker, or as a boss.

Herbert Eaton was a millionaire who lost everything when his gold mining operation went bankrupt. He was out of a job and in debt, but that was where his work for God began. He became the manager of Forest Lawn Cemetery. It sounds like a dead end job if there ever was one, but Eaton was a Baptist layman who decided that cemeteries should not glorify the devil. He was convicted that they should glorify Christ who conquered the devil and death, and who rose victorious over the grave to give eternal life. He started a dream that has radically changed the entire funeral and cemetery industry in the English speaking world.

As president of the Men's Club in the Temple Baptist Church he started a campaign to make Forest Lawn a memorial park that would bring glory to Christ. It is a story of a long and hard struggle against unbelievable odds, but he achieved his goal and made it one of the most beautiful places on this earth. He packed the place with the world's best art that glorifies the risen Lord. He did it by means of Christian principles applied in the workplace. Forest Lawn was the first company to give paid vacations to hourly wage employees. It was the first cemetery to ask for and accept suggestions from all workers. It was among the first to offer all kinds of fringe benefits. Keep in mind that we are back in the 1920's, decades before these benefits were won by long hard battles for millions of workers.

Herbert Eaton has witnessed to millions for Christ because he first did an excellent job of being a Christian worker who made all who worked with him consider it a privilege. We can't all be Eaton's, but we can all apply Christian principles in the workplace, and thus be workers who make working more pleasant for all those with whom we work. Our work itself is our first and primary witness for Christ. Next we look at-

II. OUR WORDS.

As the hands produce work, so the mind produces words. Words are also work, and not just for the writer and speaker, but for all of us. Words represent the work of the inner man. They are the labor of our thinking, feeling and caring. By means of words we do work that the hands can never do. We build buildings with our hands, but it is by our words that

we build up people by edifying and encouraging them. It is by our hands that we operate machines, but it is by words that we control relationships.

One of the key ways that Christ can transform your daily work will be by you becoming aware of how what you say is a part of your daily work. What you say after you do a good job can make all the difference in the world as to your happiness with your job, and to your effectiveness as a Christian witness. The Christian who does not have a different vocabulary from the world is going to have a hard time bridging the gap between worship and work. If you praise God with your tongue on Sunday, and then curse man with that tongue on Monday, your Jekyll and Hyde performance will please neither God nor man. Your words must develop a consistency if there is to be any transfer of the sacred to the secular. If you compartmentalize, and have a sacred vocabulary in church, but then a secular vocabulary at work, these dual dictionaries of speech never intermingle, and you will not likely be allowing Christ to influence your daily work. It is by words that we often do our greatest work for God, or it may be by the words that we never speak.

Moliere pictures the beggar on the street corner crying out for alms for the love of God. The nobleman Don Juan, a bitter ungodly man, holds out a gold coin over the arm of the beggar and says, "Blaspheme God and I'll give it to you." The temptation to conform to the value system of another for monetary gain is a universal temptation. But the beggar says, "No my Lord, I shall not blaspheme." Those words and refusal of words were a work of art as beautiful to God as a symphony or a Mona Lisa. Jesus said that by our words we will be justified or condemned. Words are works for which we shall receive or lose reward. Words are works that will transform our work as a witness to men.

To make worship practical to Monday we need to listen to God on Sunday and strive to see what we learn can be used on Monday. I think Mother Teresa of Calcutta was saying something very practical when she said, "The essential thing is not what we say, but what God says to us and through us. All our words will be useless unless they come from within. Words which do not give the light of Christ increase the darkness."

When we only communicate our words that reveal our personality and our bias's, we draw or repel people from us. This is not all bad, for it is

part of life that we cannot escape, and it can even be very good. But when we communicate the words of God and His will for man, then we help them focus on Christ and not just our personality. People should be given a chance to respond to Jesus based on who He is and His claims regardless of who we are. That is why we need to learn to share with others the words of Christ. We need to say things that can convey His convictions, even if we have not yet made them our own. The only way we can do this is to listen to the Word of God with the workplace in mind. We need to work at breaking down the barriers between the secular and the sacred.

One of the hardest working groups of Christians in the world are the Wycliff Bible Translators. They have to link the sacred and secular all day long as they seek to learn what words in a language best say what the Bible is trying to communicate. Scott MacGregor was working on a language where he had to study boats to get the story of Christ accurately communicated. Jesus preached from a boat, but the people He was trying to reach did not have a simple word for boat. They had 12 different kinds of boats, and he had to study all of them to select the one that most fit the type of fishing boat Jesus would have used. This kind of thing is going on all over the world. The search goes on for the right words to convey the Word of God to people in the context in which they live.

If we could see ourselves in this same role, it could transform our daily work. We are to bring our secular jobs into our worship with the prayer that God would open our eyes to see how His Word can change our words in a way that would convey what God wants communicated. When God wanted to save this lost secular world He sent the Word. The Word became flesh, and not only told us the will of God, but showed us by His works. Words and works are the 2 channels God used to save man.

Richard Madden took all of the words of Christ that we have recorded in the Gospels and he read them into a recorder at a normal speed. He discovered that all Jesus spoke to the world took just 11 minutes. We know Jesus spoke for many hundreds of hours to His disciples and to the crowds, but all that is recorded for time is a mere eleven-minute speech. I think it would take the average person much longer to read all that Jesus said, but the point is, Jesus expected that less than an hour of His words would change all of history. He was right, of course, and they have, and He thereby demonstrated the power of words. A major part of His work

was to leave us His words, and a major part of the work of the church is to convey these words to the world.

When the Christian had won the respect of his fellow workers by his good work, then he can have a powerful impact on them by his words. It also works the other way. If you talk down to others like a self-righteous Pharisee, your words will destroy the witness of your good work. Your words have to correspond with your work and be words of encouragement and hope that entice the worldly mind to wonder what you have found in Christ. If all you do is complain about life, the job, and man as a lousy sinner, you will not have much of appeal to the non-Christian. They need to see and hear in you one who knows just as much as they do about the crumbly side of life, but who can yet be an optimist with joy, hope and love for life. They need to hear words from you that convey how being a Christian is more than a Sunday affair. They need to see it is a life-changing affair, and that knowing Jesus makes a difference in your everyday secular life.

Peter Marshall in his famous Christianity Can Be Fun sermon said something we need to hear and make clear to others by our words:

"God is a God of laughter as well as of prayer....a God of singing, as well as of tears. God is at home in the play of His children. He loves to hear us laugh. We do not honor God by our long faces...our austerity. God wants us to be good-not "goody-goody."

There is quite a distinction. We must try to make the distinction between worship and work and play less sharp...If God is not in your typewriter as well as your hymnbook, there is something wrong with your religion. If your God does not enter your kitchen there is something the matter with your kitchen.

If you can't take God into your recreation there is something wrong with the way you play. If God, for you, does not smile, there is something wrong with your idea of God. We all believe in the God of the heroic. What we need most these days is the God of the humdrum...the commonplace...the everyday."

If we will only be conscience of the presence of God in our daily life,

our daily work will be transformed, for we will be thinking of how we can be channels of His love and truth in our work relationships. Prov. 12:25 says, "An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up." Christ could transform your daily work if you would just consciously speak a kind word to one or several of your fellow workers. You have it in your power to add to life's gloom, or to light up the room with words that encourage. Show me the Christian who will focus on excellence in his work and encouragement in his words, and I'll show you a Christian who has bridged the gap between reverence and worship and relevance in work.

14. DROP YOUR BUCKET WHERE YOU ARE Based on Prov. 17:24

This text is saying that wisdom is right in front of the man with understanding, but the fool does not see it. He roams all over the world in search of what is right under his nose. The fool is like the proverbial cow who always thinks the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. The wise man sees plenty of green grass in the field where he is. The fool can be enthusiastic about what might be if only things were different, and he was someplace else, or somebody else. He can dream of the opportunities of the future in far off places, but the wise man sees the opportunities before his eyes right where he is. Which of these two kinds of vision you have will determine the success you make of your life. Sam Foss put it-

Seek not for fresher founts afar,
Just drop your bucket where you are.

We need to pray that God will give us the wisdom to drop our buckets where we are, and fill them with the opportunities at our fingertips. Enthusiasm which looks at great and distant ends, but neglects the means to reach those ends, is the kind of zeal without knowledge that produces the unrealistic visionary. Such a visionary has great ideals, but he does little to fulfill God's will on earth, and change the real to fit the ideal. His ideal is only theoretical and not practical. He is so busy dreaming of things as they ought to be that he neglects doing anything about things as they are.

Dreaming of the pearly gates is neither Christian nor practical if it leaves you blind to the gates of opportunity in front of your eyes. We should pray frequently these words-

**Keep thou my feet: I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.**

If we learn to see the wise and practical steps before us, we can be assured that the end of the journey will hold great things for us. We are not saying that great ambitions for the future, and high ideals are unnecessary. On the contrary, they are absolutely essential to give the present meaning. The point is, we must recognize that it is only as we take advantage of the opportunities before our eyes that we can arrive at the distant goal.

Dr. Russell Conwell is famous for his story about the Pennsylvania farmer who wanted to sell his farm and go to work for his cousin in Canada. His cousin managed an oil company, and told him he could come and work for him and make a lot of money, but he would have to learn all about oil first. So the man read and studied hard, and finally wrote to his cousin telling him he knew all about oil. He sold his farm and headed for Canada. The man who bought the farm had a hard time getting his cattle to drink out of the stream because of scum on the water. When he investigated he discovered oil valued at a hundred million dollars. The man who knew all about oil had lived over a lake of it for 23 years, but he packed up and went to Canada in search of it. Had he paid more attention to his present situation he could have had everything he dreamed of.

We have got to be enthusiastic about the present if we hope the future to be pleasant. We have got to be enthusiastic about the near at hand if we want to reach that which is far away. The present is a means to the future, and the near is a means to the distance. Refuse the means and you lose the end. Grasp the means and you gain the end. This principle is demonstrated in many lives. For example, in Frank Bettger's *How I raised Myself From Failure To Success In Selling*, we have this story. Bettger was a baseball player on the Johnstown, Penn. team. He had high ambitions as a player, but was fired from the team on the grounds that he was lazy. He was shocked for he knew he was not lazy. He had just failed to put his ideal and ambition into action. He finally got another chance to play with the New Haven team, and he knew now he would have to make

his ideal practical by expressing it. He resolves that no one would ever call him lazy again. He resolves to be the most enthusiastic player on the team.

Bettger did just that, and he wrote, "From the minute I appeared on the field I acted like a man electrified. I acted as though I was alive with a million batteries." The next day the newspaper account said, "This new player Bettger has a barrel of enthusiasm. He inspired our boys." Soon he was called Pep Bettger, and within two years of being fired for laziness he was third basemen for the St. Louis Cardinals making 30 times the income. It was all because he stopped dreaming of the future, and became enthusiastic about the present. He learned the lesson to-

**Seek not for fresher founts afar,
Just drop your bucket where you are.**

"Wisdom is before him that has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth." The wise man believes he can succeed with what is at his fingertips, and he gets busy succeeding. The fool sets and waits for his ship to come in; for a break, or for his rich uncle to die. Fortunately, by God's grace those who were once fools can become wise. A janitor in a big city railroad station, many years ago, had a 45 year old helper who mopped the floor. One of the conductors like this man, and he encouraged him to find a better job. He discovered why he was a mop-pusher at 45 by his pessimistic reply-"How can I do better? I have no education, and I have a wife and 3 children, and besides, a man can't get ahead like they once could in this country." He was being a fool by looking into the distant past, and thinking of the good old days when too could have gone places by determination.

The conductor was a Christian, and he began to tell him of the power of God, and what God could do with a person who would surrender to Him and be open to His grace. He asked him to believe in the power of Christ for the present, and then he told him of a hamburger stand for sale in a near-by town. The mop-pusher opened his heart to Christ, and he had new vision and hope. He went to check out the hamburger stand. The price was \$350.00 and all he had was \$25.00 in cash. In his old days of pessimism he would have dropped it right there, but his new faith gave him an enthusiasm which refused to accept defeat. He offered the owner

\$500.00 for the stand if he would allow him a year to pay it. With this done, he then arranged with the grocer and butcher to buy supplies on credit, which would be paid for each morning from the previous days receipts.

This now practical enthusiastic man of faith used every means before his face, and he worked up to the place of owning his own restaurant. He was no longer a pessimist, but had this poem printed on his menu's as a challenge to others:

**If you think you are beaten you are;
If you think you dare not, you don't;
If you want to win, but think you can't
It's almost a cinch you won't.
If you think you'll lose you're lost;
For out in the world we find,
Success begins with a fellows will;
It's all in the state of mind.
Life's battles don't always go
To the stronger and faster man,
But sooner or later the man that wins
Is the man who thinks he can.**

That there is power in positive thinking is beyond a doubt. How much greater is that power when behind the positive thinking one knows the hand and wisdom of Christ is guiding? Paul could say in Phil. 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Here is Christian positive thinking that sees the possibilities of accomplishing God's will with what is at hand. We do not need to search for fresher founts afar, but just drop our buckets where we are.

Lewis H. Evans in his book Life's Hidden Power tells of a young man who came to his pastor and said, "You talk about the happiness of religion, but I have never found it. What is the matter with me?" The pastor said, "I'll tell you where to find it. Go to the coal yard and get a sack of coal, and go to the grocery store and get a box of groceries, and put your Bible in your pocket. Then go to this address in a tenement where widow Brown lives, and give it to her, and read the Bible to her. Then come back to me. He did these things, and he came running back to the pastor saying, "I've

found it! I've found it!" He found the happiness in Christian service, which was right under his nose, and never far away.

James said that pure religion before God was to visit the fatherless and widows, and to keep unspotted from the world. To be a servant is to be a success, and since there are always people in need of service wherever you are, you can always be a success right where you are. When Charles Kingsley graduated from Cambridge with highest honors everyone thought he would go to a large church, but instead he went to a little village of Everslie. It was a small congregation of ordinary people, and he stayed there for 33 years. Many offers came to him to finer fields, but he refused to leave. As the years passed England wore a path to that little church to hear him. He was made a chaplain to the Queen, and he went up and down the land as a flaming champion of social reform. He would have been buried in Westminster Abbey, but he chose to be buried near his little church. He had escaped completely the folly of the elsewhere thinking, and he put it in poetry.

**Do the work that's nearest,
Though its dull at whiles,
Helping when we meet them
Lame dogs over stiles.
See in every hedgerow
Marks of angel's feet;
Epics in each pebble
Underneath our feet.**

This does not mean that God does not call us to launch out into new territory. What if Abraham said I'll stay right here in Ur of Chaldees? Or what if Moses was content to remain in Egypt? Or what if Saul of Tarsus decided that Tarsus was big enough for him, and never became the Paul of worldwide missionary journey's? What we are saying is just what the Bible says. Where you are is a place of service for you right now. Where ever you are you can be used, and so seek not for fresher founts afar, but drop your bucket where you are.

