

Foundations Are Important

Proverbs 1:1-7 (01/29/17)

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How many of you are really excited about ruining your life? You want to follow the pride and arrogance of your own heart and hope to make a total mess of things down the road. You want to ruin friendships, lose jobs, destroy your own body, get addicted to drugs or alcohol, get a disease from immoral behavior, develop an angry heart that lashes out at anyone who gets in your way, destroy your marriage with your selfishness and tongue lashing of your spouse, be a sluggard who can't keep appointments, sleep when you should be working, a major excuse maker. Your attitude toward life is, "I'm in charge of my own life, I'll do whatever I want, I don't need to listen to others who know more than I do. And I certainly don't care what God and the Bible and all those so-called Christians say. They're just hypocrites anyway. I'll choose my own friends, do my own thing, make up my own mind, live to please myself, I have what I need to succeed in this life, I don't need anyone else telling me what to do. I'm right there with Sinatra. 'I'll do it my way!'" Welcome to the book of Proverbs, written to keep you from ruining your life!

THE WISE AND THE FOOL

Proverbs 1:7 is the key to this book, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning or foundation of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." If you build your life on the foundation of the fear of the Lord, you will succeed in your life, guaranteed. If you reject the fear of the Lord and choose to go your own way, you are a fool and will ruin your life, guaranteed! Which are you? As a young man or young lady, which will you choose? God's way of wisdom or the fool's way of ruining your life? It's a choice you must make. Proverbs 1:29, "They did not choose the fear of the Lord."

WHERE IS CHRIST?

Proverbs 1:1 *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:*

Solomon took over the throne of Israel after King David died. God gave him a blank check, "Ask whatever you want." Solomon asked for wisdom to know how to lead the people. God gave him wisdom and Solomon wrote much of Proverbs, a book stuffed with wisdom. The first nine chapters are strong exhortations to value and choose wisdom over folly. We'll meet Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly, both calling out to naive people in the public square. Starting in chapter 10 you have those short, pithy, memorable comparisons or contrasts, some as couplets, triplets, quadruplets, and more, all designed to imprint on our hearts God's wisdom for living for His glory. Here's one little batch.

Proverbs 25:18-20 *Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow Is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor. 19 Like a bad tooth and an unsteady foot Is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble. 20 Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar on soda, Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart.*

But where is Christ in Proverbs? News flash! Christ is the Proverbs. Christ is the wonderful Counselor as well as our Redeemer from our sin. First you need Him as your Redeemer from your sin – that's justification. Then you need Him as your Wonderful Counselor – that's sanctification.

Imagine making an appointment with someone who knew everything about you, who loved you anyway, and who knew exactly what kind of counsel you needed for your heart, your attitude, your tongue, your deeds, your marriage, your workplace, everything in your life. That's Christ. Christ is pure wisdom, the fountain of wisdom flowing out like refreshing streams straight from His mind. Colossians 2:3, "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Proverbs is His wisdom manual for your life, like a huge vault of finest gold. Will you receive it? Will you learn it? Will you submit to it? Unless you are a proud, arrogant fool who thinks you can do life on your own, you will pay careful attention.

CHRIST IS AFTER YOUR HEART IN PROVERBS

Christ is going to go deep into our hearts in our study in Proverbs. Our hearts, where we really live and think and choose and value, is referred to 66 times. He wants to grow us in wisdom for our motives, our attitudes, our words, our relationships, our marriages, our morals. He is going to give us wisdom we can't possibly find anywhere else in this world. And all is based on the fear of the Lord. This is an Old Testament way of teaching faith in God's provision of salvation in Christ. You must know God and His Son, Jesus Christ, to have a heart to embrace His wisdom. The wise man in Proverbs and Psalms is the genuine believer; the fool is the unbeliever. The wise man is the one who is building his life on the sure foundation of the fear of God and nothing will ruin him. The fool builds his life on the sand of his own opinions, reason, feelings, pride, stubbornness, self-rule and self-sufficiency. It's guaranteed that the fool's foundation will not survive. The fool's life will collapse in a sad ruin, sooner or later.

Christ wants to totally transform your heart with His wisdom.

Proverbs 1:2-6 To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, 3 To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity; 4 To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion, 5 A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, 6 To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles.

Christ gives six purpose clauses in these verses. They are like steps leading up to the front door of this marvelous temple of wisdom.

First, Christ wants to give you wisdom and instruction – vs. 2. *To know wisdom and instruction.* Wisdom (Hebrew: *chokmah* – a guttural “ch”) means the skillful application of knowledge. A wise person is one who is skilled in what he does. The craftsmen who helped build the tabernacle were skilled in their arts. But in Proverbs, wisdom is skill for living your life for God's glory. You need skill to put together a life that pleases God and brings blessing to others. Instruction (Hebrew: *musar*) means disciplined, structured training, living within the boundaries that God has revealed to us in Scripture. Growing in wisdom isn't always easy. This pursuit isn't for slackers and sluggards.

Second Christ wants to give you discernment – 2b. *To discern the sayings of understanding.* Discernment means to separate, to see through something. You need to be able to see through things from God's perspective and make good choices. God gave Daniel and his buddies in Babylon understanding and discerning knowledge. They could see through the issues and make good choices. Discernment helps you see through those commercials that are after your money. You aren't easily conned. Don't click on that skimpy-clad lady on the side of your computer screen. Discernment knows it won't help you or please God.

Third, Christ wants to give you instruction in how to live every day for God's glory – vs. 3. *To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity.* He gives us four aspects of godly living in this one verse. Wise behavior will control how you handle your money, your time, your job, your spare time. You will learn how to make right, God-honoring choices. You will treat others with justice and fairness. You won't be ripping people off, lying to people, mistreating, gossiping, or slandering them. You'll be a straight shooter with people. You'll gain the trust of all who know you.

Fourth, Christ wants to develop prudence in your life, filling your heart with godly knowledge and discretion – vs. 4. *To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion.* We are naturally naïve or simple-minded and easily conned, easily deceived and lured into bad choices; prudence will protect you. Prudence helps you see past the surface and into the heart of the issue to resolve your problem. Here's a young man with all the right moves and words and he sweeps you off your feet, but his heart is set on other things and you need prudence to avoid evil and choose the better way. You are young and haven't gone through all the experiences of older, godly people, and Christ wants to use the elders in your life – your dad, your mom, even your grandparents, godly people in the church, people who really love you and want the best for you. They will help you make good decisions. Prudence provides protection. Proverbs 22:3, “The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, but fools go on and are ruined.” And when it comes to finding a wife, listen to Proverbs 19:14 “A prudent wife is from the Lord.” She will bless your life and stand by you as your best counselor.

Fifth, Christ wants you to be teachable and aggressively go after godly counsel – vs. 5. *A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.* Proverbs 10:8 says “The wise of heart will receive commands, but a babbling fool will be thrown down.” A wise person will hunger to know God and His Word more and more. He’s not just drifting along. If you are drifting through your life, you’re bound to quietly slip over the deadly precipice to your ruin. If you’re getting old and losing your fire, as Raymond Ortlund in his commentary on Proverbs says, “Let’s not die before we die!” Stay humble and keep learning. The word “counsel” is used of ropes on a boat to navigate through rough waters and deadly shallows, steering the ship the right way, heading for the right destination. You will seek the kind of counsel God’s Word gives, avoiding those hidden but deadly rocks in the way. As a kid we skied in the Schuylkill River in Norristown, PA, and at one point they had broken down an old bridge but left broken hunks of concrete beneath the surface. We had to very carefully steer our way through the area to avoid butchering up the propeller, which occasionally happened.

Sixth, Christ wants you to grow in plumbing the depths of God’s truths and how they help you live wisely in this world – v. 6. *To understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.* This is what you have to do with the proverbs. You have to ponder the proverbs: reflect on them, question them, roll them around in your mind. You don’t chew them up like a chocolate-covered cherry and gulp them down. No, you savor them. You let them melt slowly like a fine chocolate, rolling them around in your heart and considering how they apply. Proverbs 15:1, *A soft answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger.* How does that apply? Do I give harsh answers? When? To whom? Proverbs 21:20, *There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up.* Now what does that mean? Drill into it. Keep going down until you hit oil. Aha! If I live responsibly, I’ll have what I need. But if I’m a fool, I’ll spend what little I do have and then have nothing!

This is the kind of counsel Christ is giving us in Proverbs. He gives counsel for our hearts that is wise, understanding, prudent, and practical. His wisdom will guide you so you don’t ruin your one precious life. That doesn’t mean following Christ’s wisdom will be easy or without trials and struggles and heartaches. But it does mean Christ will help you navigate through the rough waters and will give you the wisdom you need to make God-honoring decisions!

Christ assures you that the fear of the Lord is the non-negotiable foundation of a life pleasing to God.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Foundations are super important. If your foundation isn’t strong and enduring, your building will tumble and fall. The questions you have to face right now are these. On what am I building my life? What is the foundation of my life? Is it the fear of the Lord, or is it doing my own thing? Is it the fear of the Lord or is it my own reason, or feelings. Am I listening to God or other voices contradicting Scripture? You are building on something. If the fear of the Lord isn’t what you are building on, you will ruin your life.

First, what is this knowledge? It’s truth. It’s God’s revelation in the Scripture and in His creation. It’s your grasp on God’s Word and God’s world in submission to God’s authority. It is God’s revelation to you about who God is, how we got here, why we’re here, where we’re going. God’s kind of knowledge is truthful facts, especially revealed in Scripture. It’s not just human knowledge. Some people have enormous brain power, but if they aren’t building their knowledge on this foundation, if they aren’t submitted to God’s authority, they aren’t wise and their knowledge is not God’s kind of knowledge. Some use their natural brilliance for their own selfish ends, to win arguments and display how smart they are. A husband can use his knowledge to out argue and brow beat his poor wife into silence, but this isn’t the knowledge God is talking about. Jesus said it like this in John 17:3, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Second, your knowledge, your life, must rest squarely on this one non-negotiable foundation: the fear of God. Lost people often have a natural, even superstitious fear of God. They do something wrong and then worry if God’s going to get them. But the fear of the Lord here in Proverbs is the loving fear of a child

for his father. Sinclair Ferguson describes it like this: "That indefinable mixture of reverence, fear, pleasure, joy and awe which fills our hearts when we realize who God is and what He has done for us." When God saves you, He puts His fear in your heart. You begin to take God seriously. You believe His Word, submit to His authority, dread His displeasure, but delight in pleasing Him.

That is the foundation of knowledge. And you never leave that foundation. You build on top of it. It is the first and controlling principle. You bring every area of your life and learning and understanding onto this foundation. The fear of the Lord determines how you view everything. You see God's glory everywhere. When you go to the root canal specialist and look at that huge picture of a tooth on the poster and you see those tubules in the dentin part of the tooth, between the pulp and the enamel, you wonder and marvel and praise God. You realize you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Everything in this creation sings the praises of God's glory, and you are filled with awe and wonder and even a fear – how awesome must our Father in heaven be? History is His story. Your ear with its hammer, stirrup, and anvil is His engineering. Gravity is His way of keeping the moon out there and you down here. Marriage is His design for a man and a woman to enjoy life, have companionship, and reproduce. Astronomy, zoology, math, calculus, and language are part of God's design!

You can even see the glory of God in a dog's nose. Scientists are studying dogs' noses like never before because they are such a marvel of anatomical design and so helpful to mankind. Dogs have fifty times more smell receptors than humans. They smell 1000 to 10,000 times better than we do. You may think dogs smell, but scientists say we actually stink to our dogs! But they love us anyway! It's all God's glorious and awesome power, majesty, wisdom, and creative genius. Every place you look you are seeing sparks of His glory and the fear of the Lord gives Him all that glory. No wise person building on the fear of the Lord is going to be led astray by evolution and so many other man-centered views and practices flying around in our culture. There are brilliant people who believe these things, but they are brilliant fools. Even folks with an IQ over 160 like Stephen Hawking say things like this: "Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing." And "Because there is a law of gravity, the universe can and will create itself out of nothing" (cited in *God and Stephen Hawking*). This dear man may be brilliant, but he is not building his knowledge on the fear of the Lord and what he says will eventually be found to be foolish.

Now to Proverbs 1:7b – *Fools despise wisdom and instruction*. We're immediately introduced to the fool, the conceited, quarrelsome, morally insolent fool. Several words are translated "fool" in Proverbs. This word "evil" is used 58 times in Proverbs. He's not a dimwit. He may be as smart as Stephen Hawking. But he's a rebel who rejects God's wisdom, hates discipline, lives a wasted life, and finally comes to ruin. He despises God's ways and probably his parents who are praying that he would go God's way. Hopefully that doesn't describe you. You may be a young person or a naïve person, and you may be allured by this seductive world, by people who talk big, act big, scoff at the whole God, Bible, Gospel, Jesus thing. In your pride and arrogance you too may scoff and despise the things of God. This is the sure way to ruin your life. The choice is yours!

Here's the wonderful thing. Christ's heart is wide open to fools. And folks, that includes all of us. Sin made fools of us all. We had no fear of God before our eyes. Christ came into the world to save fools. Don't ruin your life. Bow your heart to Him and enter His school of wisdom. Christ will give you the grace to glorify your Father and be blessed in this world and beyond!