

Woodland Baptist Church  
 Wednesday, June 4, 2014  
 Seeking Wisdom Together - Proverbs 16:16-33

1) INTRODUCTION

- a) All commentary is taken from:
- i) Dr. Thomas Constable, Commentary on Proverbs; UBS Handbook: Proverbs; Proverbs: An Expository Commentary, Ironside; The Bible Knowledge Commentary; Matthew Henry Commentary; Pulpit Commentary

2) READ PROVERBS 16:16-33

- a) **16 How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.**
- i) "Wisdom" and "understanding" are more valuable than "gold" and "silver" (cf. 8:10, 19). People who give their lives to pursue what God considers wise, and to understand what He has revealed, rather than worldly treasure—such as Barnabas and Paul—live out the truth of this proverb. Daniel was one who pursued divine wisdom and knowledge and became rich (Dan. 5:11). The false "wisdom" that does not begin with the fear of God, and does not depart from evil, is a Satanic counterfeit to be avoided (cf. Col. 2:8-12).<sup>1</sup>
- (1) "Wisdom has inestimable superiority to precious metals because it bestows spiritual virtues along with material benefits (see 3:13-18). Wealth without wisdom is vulgar and greedy and/ or may be due to ruthless individualism."<sup>2</sup>
- b) **17 The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life.**
- i) "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil." The way trodden by the upright is compared to a properly constructed path which has been leveled and cleared of obstructions. One who wishes to walk this path **must depart**

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<sup>1</sup> Constable on Proverbs

<sup>2</sup> Waltke

from evil. Furthermore, “the one who keeps his soul guards his way.” He does not walk aimlessly, but makes a conscious choice to walk on the way of the upright.<sup>3</sup>

(1) We must remember that the decisions we make do not only affect us but those within our influence. All of the decisions we make have **eternal consequences**.

(a) **1 Corinthians 3:12-15** - 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

c) **18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.**

i) Note, 1. Pride will have a fall. Those that are of a haughty spirit, that think of themselves above what is meet, and look with contempt upon others, that with their pride affront God and disquiet others, will be brought down, either by repentance or by ruin. It is the honour of God to humble the proud, Job 40:11, 12. It is the act of justice that those who have lifted up themselves should be laid low. Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, were instances of this. Men cannot punish pride, but either admire it or fear it, and therefore God will take the punishing of it into his own hands. Let him alone to deal with proud men. 2. Proud men are frequently most proud, and insolent, and haughty, just before their destruction, so that it is a certain presage that they are upon the brink of it. When proud men set God's judgments at defiance, and think themselves at the greatest distance from them, it is a sign that they are at the door; witness the case of Benhadad and Herod. While the word was in the king's mouth, Dan. 4:31. Therefore let us not fear the pride of others, but greatly fear pride in ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, “Wisdom Literature and Psalms”

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry

**d) 19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.**

i) This is a **paradox** (what is a paradox?) which the children of this world cannot understand and will not subscribe to, that it is better to be poor and humble than to be rich and proud.

(1) 1. Those that divide the spoil are commonly proud; they value themselves and despise others, and their mind rises with their condition; those therefore that are rich in this world have need to be charged that they be not high-minded, 1 Tim. 6:17. Those that are proud and will put forth themselves, that thrust, and shove, and scramble, for preferment, are the men that commonly divide the spoil and share it among them; they have the world at will and the ball at their foot.

(2) 2. It is upon all accounts better to take our lot with those whose condition is low, and their minds brought to it, than to covet and aim to make a figure and a bustle in the world. Humility, though it should expose us to contempt in the world, yet while it recommends us to the favour of God, qualifies us for his gracious visits, prepares us for his glory, secures us from many temptations, and preserves the quiet and repose of our own souls, is much better than that high-spiritedness which, though it carry away the honour and wealth of the world, makes God a man's enemy and the devil his master.<sup>5</sup>

**e) 20 Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.**

i) A person who gives heed to (lit., "is prudent" with regard to, or "ponders"; trans. "takes note of" in 21:12) instruction (dāḇār, "word"; also trans. "instruction" in 13:13), prospers (cf. 19:8), that is, has God's blessing of happiness. Such a person is also one who trusts in the Lord and therefore is blessed.

ii) "The eye of faith pierces through the darkest cloud and reads God's thoughts of peace and love. All the world cannot rob us of one Word of God. Providence may seem to oppose his promises. But there is more reality in the smallest promise of God than in the greatest performance of man."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Henry

<sup>6</sup> Charles Bridges

**f) 21 The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.**

- i) The connection between heart and lips is made once again, here to demonstrate how reputation can also enhance teaching. Once again, the charge to gain wisdom carries with it a second charge to pass it on to others by means of persuasive teaching.<sup>7</sup>
- ii) Presumably the "wise in heart" will use "sweetness of speech." That seems to be the thought linking the two lines of this proverb. Two things will be characteristic of such a person: he or she will rightly enjoy a reputation as a discerning person, and his or her words will persuade others. Solomon developed a reputation for being a wise man, which the Queen of Sheba acknowledged (1 Kings 10:6-7). And the Apostle Paul persuaded many people with his speeches (2 Cor. 5:11).<sup>8</sup>

**g) 22 Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it, but the instruction of fools is folly.**

- i) "A fountain of life is understanding to the one who has it." The possessor of understanding has in himself a source of comfort and an invigorating power which is as refreshing as a cool spring to a thirsty traveler. In all troubles he can fall back upon his own good sense and prudence, and satisfy himself therewith. On the other hand, "the chastisement of fools is folly." Folly is the scourge which punishes a fool. By refusing the teaching of wisdom, the fool makes misery for himself, deprives himself of the happiness which virtue gives, and pierces himself through with many sorrows (16:22).<sup>9</sup>

**h) 23 The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips.**

- i) Solomon had commended eloquence, or the sweetness of the lips (v. 21), and seemed to prefer it before wisdom; but here he corrects himself, as it were, and shows that unless there be a good treasure within to support the eloquence, it is worth little. Wisdom in the heart is the main matter.

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<sup>7</sup> Koptac, 419

<sup>8</sup> Constable

<sup>9</sup> James Smith, Wisdom and Psalms

- (1) 1. It is this that directs us in speaking, that teaches the mouth what to speak, and when, and how, so that what is spoken may be proper, and pertinent, and seasonable; otherwise, though the language be ever so fine, it had better be unsaid.
- (2) 2. It is this that gives weight to what we speak and adds learning to it, strength of reason and force of argument, without which, let a thing be ever so well worded, it will be rejected, when it comes to be considered, as trifling. Quaint expressions please the ear, and humour the fancy, but it is learning in the lips that must convince the judgment, and sway that, to which wisdom in the heart is necessary.<sup>10</sup>
- i) **24 Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.**
- i) Pleasure and health flow from the words of man in the things of God. The eunuch was encouraged by Philip's exposition of precious Scripture in Acts 8:35-39. The two disciples were refreshed from their conversation with their divine Master on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:32. When God is the subject and his Spirit the teacher, pleasant indeed will be the words spoken by Christians. The will exceed any earthly enjoyment.<sup>11</sup>
- 3) **Evil Fire on the Lips (25-30)** - negative images dominate this cluster, particularly the villainous person.<sup>12</sup>
- a) **25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.**
- i) A verbatim repetition of 14:12, one can choose the way that seems right or straight to the eye, but such vision is often impaired. Only by choosing the Lord's way can we be certain we are headed in the right direction.<sup>13</sup>
- ii) What would be an example of a "way seeming right." False religions? Vain philosophies? Examples?

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Henry

<sup>11</sup> Bridges, 135

<sup>12</sup> Koptac

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

**b) 26 A worker's appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on.**

- i) As the desire for food motivates one to work, so all of one's desires and appetites propel him to productive activity. One might think that "hunger," which is uncomfortable, is a bad thing, but really it has a beneficial result. Therefore one should not despise what is distasteful (like hunger), because it can lead on to what is good and profitable. Job's trials appeared to him at first to be unbearable, but they had a beneficial result.<sup>14</sup>

**c) 27 A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.**

- i) Verses 27–30 refer to troublemakers of various kinds—those who plot evil (v. 27), stir up strife (v. 28), lead others into violence (v. 29), and persist in sin (v. 30). A scoundrel, literally, "a man of belial" (cf. 6:12), is worthless and wicked, and lives in deep moral degradation. He plots evil (cf. 1:10–14; 6:14; 12:20; 14:22; 24:2, 8). "Plots evil" is literally "digs a calamity," which suggests the effort he puts forth to dig a pit to trap others. One of the main ways in which he does this is by words that burn like ... fire (cf. James 3:5–6).<sup>15</sup>

**d) 28 A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.**

- i) "A perverse person stirs up strife." The "perverse person" is literally "the person of upside down (utterances)." A person who perverts truth intentionally creates strife and discord. Furthermore, "a backbiter causes a best friend to separate." Some malicious individuals are determined by their twisted talk to turn one away from his best friend.<sup>16</sup>

(1) **Titus 3:10-11** - 10 As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, 11 knowing that such a person is **warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.**

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<sup>14</sup> Constable

<sup>15</sup> Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>16</sup> James Smith, *Wisdom and Psalms*

e) **29 A man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in a way that is not good.**

- i) Definitely not "loving your neighbor as yourself." His way may always look more flashy and more exciting, but in the end most of the time, chaos will ensue.
- ii) **Romans 1:28-31** - 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

f) **30 Whoever winks his eyes plans dishonest things; he who purses his lips brings evil to pass.**

- i) Likewise the winking of the eye, often behind the back of the intended victim, signals that the person winking does not really mean what he is saying but is deceiving and is up to no good (cf. 6:13). Therefore one is wise to note these warning signals and suspect something bad. This proverb advances the thought of the previous one. By offering Jacob the blood-soaked tunic of Joseph, the brothers hinted at Joseph's death (Gen. 37:31-33).<sup>17</sup>

4) **Patience, Reverence and Endurance - 16:31-33**

a) **31 Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.**

- i) **Leviticus 19:32 - 32** "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.
- ii) **1 Timothy 5:1-2** - Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.
- iii) Often evil people live to be old and their hair turns white (or "gray" or silver), but characteristically the godly live longer, and when they have white hair, it is as a "**crown of honor (glory)**" on their heads for being righteous (cf. 3:16; 20:29).

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<sup>17</sup> Constable

(1) "Riotous living in youth generally means decrepitude in middle age, and premature death. Temperance and righteousness tend to strength of body and length of days."

iv) Moses and Caleb both received honor for their righteousness in their old age, and we may assume, because of their advanced years, that their hair turned white—though that is unknown for sure (Deut. 34:7; Josh. 14:11).

**b) 32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.**

i) It is harder, but "better," to master one's "anger" and rule one's own "spirit," than it is to master many other people. The reason it is harder is that our own desires are frequently stronger than the antagonism that we face from others. The reason it is better is that if one cannot master his or her passions, that one is vulnerable to mastery by others.

(1) Jesus demonstrated remarkable self-mastery during His unjust trials, as did Paul during his. "A bad temper is often excused on the ground of natural infirmity, but it is rather the evidence of unjudged pride and impatience. 'Learn of Me,' said Jesus, 'for I am meek and lowly in heart' [Matt. 11:29]. The meek man is not a spiritless man, but he is slow to anger. He can be righteously stirred when occasion requires, but not when it is his own dignity that is in question. 'Add to patience self-control' [2 Pet. 1:6] is a word for us all. It is generally a sign of weakness when one allows himself to become angry and excited in the face of opposition."

**c) 33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.**

i) Note, 1. The divine Providence orders and directs those things which to us are perfectly casual and fortuitous. Nothing comes to pass by chance, nor is an event determined by a blind fortune, but every thing by the will and counsel of God. What man has neither eye nor hand in God is intimately concerned in. 2. When solemn appeals are made to Providence by the casting of lots, for the deciding of that matter of moment which could not otherwise be at all, or not so well, decided, God must be eyed in it, by prayer, that it may be disposed aright (Give a perfect lot, 1 Sa. 14:41; Acts 1:24), and by acquiescing in it when it is disposed, being satisfied that the hand of God is in it and that hand directed by infinite wisdom. All the disposals of Providence concerning our affairs we must look upon to be the directing of our lot, the determining of what we referred to God, and must be reconciled to them accordingly.