

Proverbs Chapter 1

The first epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians introduces us to Messiah thus:

“... who of God is *made unto us wisdom*, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:30-31).

The citation being made in this passage is from Jeremiah 9:24, the context of which perfectly matches its exposition in 1 Corinthians 1. The verse immediately preceding the cited words give the exhortation: “Let not the wise man glory *in his wisdom* ...”. This quotation in 1 Corinthians therefore introduces Christ as *the Wisdom of God* to be held in honour, as distinct from the elevation of Man’s wisdom, which in the Father’s Purpose is brought to nothing (1 Cor. 1:19).

It is commonly recognized that the two themes entwined together in the book of Proverbs are those of Wisdom and Folly. Many verses are brought together to show the virtue of the one, and the shame of the other. “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom” (Prov. 4:7) is the central exhortation. Our Master, Jesus Christ is “*the word made flesh*” (Jno. 1:14) and is therefore the embodiment of Yahweh’s Wisdom - as we have seen from the above, he is “*made unto us wisdom &c.*” Our endeavour in this article is to demonstrate that the things concerning the “Wisdom” of Yahweh revealed in the book of Proverbs, have an application to our Master, as the manifestation and embodiment of that wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

THE CALL OF WISDOM

Proverbs chapter 1 describes the call of Wisdom:

“Wisdom crieth without: she uttereth her voice in the streets. *She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates ...*”

And part of wisdom’s message is:

“... turn you at my reproof: *behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you*” (Prov. 1:20, 23).

These things find an application to our Master:

“In the last day, that great day of the feast, *Jesus stood and cried*, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But *this spake he of the Spirit*, which they that believe on him should receive) (Jno. 7:37-39).

Here, Jesus, as the embodiment of Wisdom stood in the chief place of concourse, and called out for men to repent. But interestingly, he also makes reference to the Spirit to be bestowed upon those of his day. The Spirit in its operation, gave verification of the words preached, by providing “signs and wonders” (Heb. 2:4). Those who received not the testimony of the Spirit therefore, brought added reason for their judgment, as we shall proceed to show.

Returning back to Proverbs chapter 1, we find that by contrast to the seekers of Wisdom, men delight in the frivolity of fleshly things:

“How long, ye simple ones, will ye *love* simplicity? And the scorers *delight* in their scorning, and fools *hate* knowledge” (Prov. 1:22)

Here, we have a description which though speaking directly about Israel, also accurately portrays the ways of the flesh as manifested in all ages—including our own. It is not only the case that the “simple” by the nature of their circumstance, have not had the opportunity to hear the wisdom: when it was spoken to them, they refused to hear it. They “hated” knowledge, and instead delighted in their simplicity.

The principles here are highly applicable to our own age. As a rule, men do not receive the things of the spirit of God—and neither can they, for they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). They delight in pleasures, being “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4). They spurn Yahweh’s command to repent, and give no regard to the warnings of coming judgment. In our age, a “simple faith” is sometimes said to be all sufficient in Biblical matters - directly opposing our Heavenly Fathers’ command to “*study to shew thyself approved unto God*” (2 Tim. 2:15). Rather than to seek the Wisdom that comes from a constant application to the Word, it is increasingly common for those who advocate study to be disparaged as seeking “head knowledge” (as if knowledge could be gained from the use of any other part of the body than the head!), being “academic,” and even “showing off”. Such is one of many travesties in this generation: seekers of Wisdom are derided, and the “simple” in knowledge are honored. How we long for the situation to be reversed!

The words of Jeremiah come to mind, which are particularly appropriate here:

“the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; **and my people love to have it so**” (Jer.5:31).

Having what the Apostle calls “itching ears”, it seems that men will believe anything but what is the Truth. As a general principle, men hate the Truth as being too restrictive for their liking, and instead seek liberty to indulge the flesh. But Yahweh is not mocked. Though men may preach license and liberty, “they themselves are the servants of corruption” (2 Pet. 2:19), and shall be rewarded according to their deeds.

AN OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Proverbs chapter 1 continues:

“turn you at my reproof: behold, ***I will pour out my Spirit unto you***, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded” (Prov. 1:23-24).

We find then, that though an arm of salvation was extended to the people, they refused to take hold of it. Yahweh called, and they refused.

The situation described here is similar to that described in Jeremiah chapter 7, contrasting Israel to the days of Samuel the seer:

“ ... I called you, ***but ye answered not***” (Jer. 7:13)

“... this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice ... ***but they hearkened not***” (Jer. 7:24)

“***yet they hearkened not unto me***, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them, ***but they will not hearken to thee***: but thou shalt also call unto them; ***but they will not answer thee***” (Jer. 7:26-27).

So it was the people refused the spirit of Wisdom that was taught to them. Hebrews 12 also provides a highly relevant exhortation:

“See that ye ***refuse not*** him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb. 12:25).

The exhortation therefore, is to give ear to the voice of Wisdom. Though we do not have Holy Spirit guidance and instruction in the same sense as did the 1st Century disciples—though we do not experience the outpouring of that Spirit— we do nevertheless have the complete written Word: a product of the Spirit. And giving due attention to that Word is the only means by which we might receive Divine Wisdom. Israel refused, and though the Holy Spirit was poured out to them at Pentecost, this served only to entrench men in their sins, with a day of judgment to come upon them at unawares.

The chapter continues:

“Ye have *set at nought* all my counsel, and would none of my reproof” (Prov. 1:25).

Our Master, as the pre-eminent Voice of Wisdom was similarly rejected by men who sought after their own devices and pleasures. He spoke to his disciples how “that he might suffer many things, and *be set at nought*” (Mark 9:12) Again, his words were fulfilled: “Herod and his men of war *set him at nought*, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate” (Lu. 23:11).

There is a significant irony in the terms being used here. Messiah was “set at nought” by men, but in the passage we began at, 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we find that in actual fact those ignorant men who were wise in their own conceits were set at nought by our Father:

“ ... it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and *will bring to nothing* the understanding of the prudent ... God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:19, 27).

The wisdom of man being circumvented by the preaching of the cross, the wisdom of the wise was demonstrated to be inferior to the wisdom of Yahweh, to the extent that one will lead to the grave, and the other along the narrow path to the coming Kingdom.

HATING KNOWLEDGE

We already cited Proverbs 1:22, speaking of how the foolish “hate knowledge”. They not only refused to hear it; they *hate* it. The same expression occurs in verse 29:

“for that they *hated knowledge*, and did not choose the fear of Yahweh” (Prov.1:29).

This is the way of the foolish: to scorn, deride, and hate the knowledge of Yahweh’s Revealed Truth. This was the underlying reason for Israel’s destruction. As Hosea prophesied: “my people are destroyed *for lack of knowledge*” (Hos. 4:6) - a characteristic of all men of the flesh since.

A similar principle is seen in the context of the Flood coming upon the earth, as recounted in the Genesis Narrative. Noah is himself described as being “*a preacher of righteousness*” (2 Pet. 2:5). He must, by the very nature of his circumstances, have made reference in his preaching to the coming judgment of the Flood. Yet Messiah tells us that “*they knew not* until the flood came, and took them all away” (Mat. 24:39). How can this be? Men were destroyed through lack of knowledge: “they *knew not*”. They ought to have known, as Noah was preaching to them: the only explanation is that the words uttered fell upon deaf ears: the people did not *want* to know; although they had ears to hear, and eyes to see, both were closed to the things of the Spirit. And this is what Israel were like, in their response (or rather lack of response) to the preaching of the Prophets.

Spurning the call of Wisdom, Israel made themselves ripe for judgment - as Proverbs 1 continues: “I will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you” (Prov. 1:26-27)

Here are the choices set before us in the example of Israel: seek wisdom, and we shall find Life. Spurn wisdom, and our calamity will be well deserved.

Christopher Maddocks