

COMMENTS ABOUT THE PROVERBS

As with the rest of Scripture, whatever is written in the book of Proverbs is reliable and trustworthy. More than that, it is authoritative and binding in all of life. Yet being proverbs (inspired and reliable though they are), there are some characteristics which people tend to forget.

Take as an example the fact that proverbs often deal with isolated dimensions of life. In "real life," there are *many* dimensions (not just one) that affect a person's life. As a result, the full impact of the proverb will not always be immediately visible.

Consider a proverb that shows a contrast between two opposing ways of life. Usually, the proverb will describe the one way of life as bringing beneficial consequences, and the other as bringing harmful consequences. Now, these two contrasting results (from the two contrasting ways of life) are accurately described. And if there were two people who were the opposite in this one specific area *yet identical in every other way*, they would receive opposite consequences (at least within the scope of this one area). Yet since so many other factors are involved in life, these contrasting results are not always visible in full force.

Such factors include more than just our own consistent obedience (or disobedience) to other proverbs and teachings found in Scripture. People do not normally live in total isolation from each other. And the sinfulness or righteousness of the community (or nation) in which one lives will also have an influence on the extent to which he experiences God's blessing. There is also the dimension that we could call "temporary inconsistencies." (See Psalm 73 or the book of Job.) All of these factors (which we could perhaps call "environmental factors") must be taken into consideration.

In this life, one will not always be guaranteed that what is mentioned in any specific proverb will occur to the full extent that is stated. The multiplicity of factors that are part of one's life - both controllable and uncontrollable - will prevent this. But the likelihood or probability of such an outcome will increase, within the context of the other factors. The more a person follows the authoritative guidelines of the book of Proverbs, the more likely he will reap the beneficial consequences. The more a person goes *against* them, the more likely he will experience the destructive consequences that are warned against.

There are other items to consider when examining the sayings in Proverbs. For instance, the proverbs themselves have a strong emphasis on one's *present* life. They were written to teach us how to live *now*, not merely how to live someday in the distant future. To be sure, the future aspect of reality (which we call "eternity") is not denied by the Proverbs. It sometimes directly referred to, but it is not the primary emphasis.

A consequence of the emphasis on the "here and now" is that even those who do not know God can experience some of the benefits of following the proverbs! This is due to the graciousness of God, who gives good gifts to both the righteous and the unrighteous. Quite sadly, however, the good benefits are only temporary for such a person (they cease at his death, when he finds himself standing before his judge).

Another issue is that of the "time factor." People often want immediate results. (Where is their concept of "patience," or "perseverance?") The Proverbs (the rest of the Bible, for that matter) do not guarantee instant results for impatient people. (Impatience would more represent the one who does not live according to the Proverbs, than one who does!)

Not all proverbs are promises or show the best way of living. Some are nothing more than observations. They merely describe aspects of life - "the way it is" - whether or not that way is good or worthy of practice. We live in an evil day, and some proverbs merely describe what we should expect in the world around us, or why certain things happen. They are in no way endorsing the evil they describe.

"Temporary inconsistencies" are just that. Even if (in the extreme) they would last a lifetime, they cease at death for the child of God. (Remember that "death" for the Christian is nothing like death for the non-Christian!) As we read in the prophetic sections of the Bible, a wonderful day is coming for those who belong to God! On that day, everything that is in any way related to the presence of sin and evil will be forever removed. And all the "temporary inconsistencies" of life will be gone forever. (In the meantime, however, while such things exist in our lives, we know that they are there for a purpose. And we know that the purpose is good.)

For those who do *not* submit to God and his Word, there are also "temporary inconsistencies." This includes everything that can be called "good" or "pleasant" - the blessings of God. And the same day that the child of God eagerly awaits for will be a day of terror and distress for this group of people. For on that day, the blessings of God will be forever removed.

The blessings of the disciple of Christ are not limited to "physical" blessings. The true Christian is blessed (as it says, in Psalm 1) in *all* he does, under *all* circumstances. There may (and will) be temporary inconsistencies, as far as physical blessings are concerned, but the "spiritual" blessings in Christ cannot be altered by outward circumstances. In fact, even times of persecution can be looked on as a context for receiving the blessings of God! It has been said that it is better to be a Christian under the *worst* of circumstances in life, than to be a non-Christian under the *best* of circumstances in life. To us, the bad is temporary; to them the good is temporary.

The Proverbs of the Bible are not merely "good suggestions" or "antiquated opinions." They do not have the fleeting value of man-made sayings, clichés, or maxims. On the contrary, they are unchangeable and inescapable wisdom. (Man-made sayings have authentic, lasting value only to the extent that they agree with the proverbs of the Bible.)

We cannot "pick and choose" among the Proverbs - accepting some and disregarding others. Remember that the Proverbs found in the Bible are *not* man-made; they have their origin in God. To ignore them is folly. To act as though they were not true is to choose to be a fool.

The Proverbs are life. To disregard them is death.