

Proverbs Lesson 04

Proverbs Chapter 4

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Introduction: In Proverbs Chapter 4, Solomon sets forth three profound truths: (1) the exhortation to seek wisdom and understanding; (2) the exhortation to abhor ungodly companions; and (3) the exhortation to live a righteous and holy life.

I. A Father's Wise Instruction

Pro 4:1 Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.

Pro 4:2 For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.

The immediate speaker is Solomon speaking to his children. However, once again, One far greater stands in the shadows speaking to His children down through the ages. His counsel is to (1) pay heed to our heavenly Father and (2) more specifically to hearken to learn (i.e., know) understanding.

The greater point is to listen to the voice of God and to be ready to learn understanding from Him. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. The word translated as doctrine (xql leqach) has as the basic sense of 'teaching.' Indeed, God's Word provides excellent teaching for the issues of life. Therefore, God directs us to not forsake His law. How often do His people do exactly that? Perhaps not on purpose, yet just the same, they forsake His Law.

Pro 4:3 For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.

Pro 4:4 He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.

The focus returns to Solomon and his earthly parents. Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba. Clearly implied is the sweet relationship he had with his mother. In view is the fatherly advice given by David to his son Solomon when he was a youth. The basic instruction of David to his son was, "Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live." Sound advice that is to this day.

A wise father will instruct his children to (1) pay attention to him and then to (2) obey. The result is quantity and quality of life. A wise parent will lay the

foundation for instruction and obedience early in life.

A rebellious and disobedient child is the fault of the parent(s). Good parenting lays an early foundation of teaching a child to listen and obey. If a child does not, it reveals poor training by the parent(s).

Pro 4:5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.

Pro 4:6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.

The focus now returns to Solomon's instruction to his children. Again, One greater than Solomon is speaking through him. The sacred instructor sets forth a series of profound imperatives which frame the primary purpose of the Book of Proverbs.

The children of God are enjoined to get wisdom and understanding. As is the case in much of the Book of Proverbs, wisdom and understanding are found together. (That is the case on twenty-six occasions.) Understanding is the forerunner of wisdom. It is not until we understand an issue that we will have wisdom to make wise decisions regarding a matter.

Understanding requires learning and study. It does not come passively. It is mental work. How often do Christians avoid obtaining greater understanding of the Scriptures or the issues of life because it requires effort? Mental and spiritual laziness will never develop understanding of the issues of life. And, it is not until understanding is acquired that wisdom will develop. The second phrase, forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth is actually in the imperfect mood, but carries the force of an imperative. Thus, we are further directed to not forget understanding and wisdom nor slip from the instruction thereof.

Again, lazy and unmotivated Christians will easily forget or slide away from the wisdom and understanding of God. That usually begins when a Christian slides out of the Word on a daily basis. It is then that he or she begins to forget the words of His mouth and slide downhill (i.e., decline) away from serving God. Therefore, the sacred writer enjoins God's people to "forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee".

When the people of God seek after the Word of God and the wisdom and understanding which derive therefrom, she (i.e., wisdom) will preserve them. Moreover when we come to love godly wisdom, she will guard us. The greater truth is that the obtaining and development of godly wisdom (from the Word of God) will become a wall of protection for God's people. It protects and guards them from all manner of trouble and problems.

Pro 4:7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy

getting get understanding.

Pro 4:8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.

Pro 4:9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.

That which follows is an implied conclusion. Though not stated, clearly implied is a therefore. Therefore, wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. The word translated as principal (tyvar re'shiyth) has the sense of 'primary,' or 'first,' or 'chief.' The thought is how that wisdom ought to be a first priority in life. It is crucial and of the highest priority. One can only wonder how many a Christian considers the obtaining of wisdom to be of the highest priority? So, another imperative (i.e., command) is set forth: "therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."

The word translated as get (hnq kaw-naw') also has the idea of to 'buy,' 'acquire,' or 'purchase.' Implied is that the obtaining of wisdom very well may cost something. It may not be easy to obtain. Yet, it remains a high priority of life. The word translated as getting (Nynq kin-yawn') also has the sense of 'possessions' or 'stuff.' The thought is how that in the midst of all of our things and stuff to get understanding.

Once again, understanding is the antecedent to wisdom. It is its forerunner. The focal point of the Book of Proverbs has been identified. God's people desperately need to seek after and develop godly wisdom built upon right understanding of the issues of life (not to mention the Word of God). Once again, the "her" refers to wisdom. When we exalt wisdom, making it a high priority in life, she will promote us and honor us when we embrace her.

Clearly implied is that the obtaining of wisdom will bring great blessing and help to one's life. However, such promotion and honor come only as we embrace and integrate such godly wisdom into our lives. In fashion similar to that of Proverbs 2:13-18, the sacred writer describes further blessings which accrue to one obtaining godly wisdom. Wisdom and understanding will not only bring promotion in life, they will add graciousness and even glory to us.

In short, the obtaining of godly wisdom is a profound blessing. It will protect, promote, and bring honor and glory. How stupid are the multitudes who ignore the available wisdom of God? How smart are those who seek after and obtain such wisdom?

II. A Father's Wise Instruction

Pro 4:10 Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many.

*Pro 4:11 I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.
Pro 4:12 When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.
Pro 4:13 Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.*

Once again, Solomon is the speaker. However, once again, our great heavenly Father is clearly in view. Profound advice for any young man is that the instruction of his father will add length of life as well as quality of life. Stupid are young men who ignore the instruction of a godly father. Such instruction is only for their own good. Though Solomon advised his son how he had pointed him in the right direction, how much more can it be said that our heavenly Father has done so. God certainly has taught us wisdom.

Our need is to pay attention thereto. Both earthly fathers, as well as our heavenly Father, seek to lead us in the right direction. There is great wisdom in paying heed to both. *‘When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.’*

The idea is how that when we follow the advice of our great heavenly Father, we will not get into tight places or binds in life. Moreover, we will avoid stumbling blocks and obstacles in life. In short, godly wisdom from a wise father (whether earthly or heavenly) will be of great value in life. The wisdom of God, especially, will enable us to avoid many problems and obstacles in life.

The sacred writer concludes this section by urging, “Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.” The word translated as instruction (rowm moo-sawr’) has as its most basic sense, ‘discipline,’ ‘chastening,’ and ‘correction.’ In the context of receiving the instruction of a father, the thought clearly is of also receiving the correction thereof.

Such correction and discipline are a vital part of life. Therefore, a young person is advised by God to never let such discipline slip away. Rather, guard the same carefully. Clearly implied is the wisdom of receiving correction and discipline of a parent. It is wise and valuable.

*Pro 4:14 Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.
Pro 4:15 Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.
Pro 4:16 For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.
Pro 4:17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.*

The sacred writer now shifts to specific wisdom and advice. The principle of separation is clearly in view. The thought closely parallels that of Psalm 1:1. The clear teaching throughout the Bible is to get as far away from the world and

from ungodliness as possible. See II Corinthians 6:17, Romans 12:2, I John 2:15-17, and James 4:4.

1Jn 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1Jn 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

1Jn 2:17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

There is a twofold wisdom here. (1) Don't go where the wicked go and (2) don't run with them. The very way of the wicked leads to sin and trouble. See also Psalm 1:1. 15 Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. The simple truth so eloquently set forth is to avoid the way of the ungodly at all costs. Don't go near it. Stay away from it. Steer clear of it.

In short, come out from among them and be ye separate. Profound is such wisdom. Moreover, it will have a profound impact on our children. See Deuteronomy 4:40 and 5:29 as well as Proverbs 16:17.

Deu 5:29 O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

The thought continues of the ways of the ungodly. "For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall." How clear the description of ungodly men and women is to this day. They stay up all hours of the night indulging in all manner of sin. Furthermore, they delight in enticing someone into sin whether it be violence, theft, intoxication or immorality. The world's crowd to this day indulges in all manner of sin as if it were bread. They intoxicate themselves which often leads to violence. Indeed, immorality, intoxication, and violence are all related.

III. The Path of the Just is as the Shining Light

Pro 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Pro 4:19 The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.

In contrast, the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The sacred writer uses the illustration of daybreak and the rising of the sun to illustrate his point. The subject is "the path of the just" (i.e., the righteous). Even as the dawn breaks and then rises to the fullness of the noonday sun, so is the path of those who order their lives by the principle of

righteousness.

The way of the righteous is clear and brightly lighted. It becomes even more so with the advance of time. In contrast “the way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble. Righteousness is associated with light. Wickedness is routinely associated with darkness.

Indeed, men love darkness, because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). Most sin and immorality take place under the cover of darkness. Righteousness is a function of broad daylight. Moreover, whereas the righteous have a clearly lighted path, the wicked stumble through life, not even knowing what they trip over. Clearly implied is the stability and prosperity of righteousness opposes the instability and poverty associated with sin.

Pro 4:20 My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings.

Pro 4:21 Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart.

Pro 4:22 For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.

Once again, the profound wisdom of paying attention to a godly parent is set forth. Solomon urges his son to pay heed to his advice. There is great wisdom for a young person to value the instruction and advice of a parent. Accordingly, Solomon admonishes his son to never let his training be forgotten, but rather to hide it in his heart.

Once again, the greater truth is of God’s people paying heed to the instruction of our heavenly Father. The lessons of a godly parent (not to mention that of our heavenly Father) are a wellspring of life. Clearly implied is that godly instruction even produces physical health. How often do sinful practices leave people with disease and disability. Godliness prevents both.

Pro 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Pro 4:24 Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.

The chapter concludes with a list of basic proverbs of life. The first is to guard our heart carefully, for out of it spring the issues of life. The decisions of life spring from our heart. From the heart can come forth godliness, truth, goodness, and righteousness. However, as Jesus taught, “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19).

When one’s heart is not carefully guarded, the evil one will attempt to steal it away with the various enticements and temptations of the world. And when sin begins to run its course, it invariably brings all manner of trouble and eventually even death.

It is not coincidental that the first warning is of a froward mouth and perverse lips. In verse 24, the word translated froward here (twvqe ik-kesh-ooth') has the sense of 'crooked' or 'dishonest.' The definition above when applied to a person's speech and motive means perverse lips. The greater thought is to not allow a devious or dishonest mouth.

The basic character of the devil is that of dishonesty. He is a liar and the father of all lies (John 8:44). Nothing is more intrinsically satanic than lying. Solomon urged his son to distance himself from any temptation to be dishonest.

Pro 4:25 Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.

Pro 4:26 Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.

Pro 4:27 Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.

There frequently are temptations and distractions along life's way. For some it is the temptation of alcohol or other intoxicants. For others it may be the temptation to steal. It might be the temptation of sexual impurity, or materialism or avarice. There is much enticement throughout life. These temptations are found not far of the straight and narrow way. When a person takes thier eyes off the path they travel, their direction changes as well. If you look toward the left long enough, you will incline to the left.

The godly advice of the inspired writer is to keep our sights straight ahead and not upon the enticements along the wayside (This is true both literally and otherwise). In many cities, prostitutes advertise themselves by wearing skimpy attire along the roadside. God's advice is to keep your eyes straight ahead.

The same is true for numerous other manifestations that may cause sin. If you look at another person's possessions long enough, you may begin to covet them. If you covet them long enough, you just might steal them. God's counsel is to keep our eyes on the way before and not glance at the enticements along with way. *"Ponder the path of thy feet and let all thy ways be established."*

Once again using the analogy of a roadway, the sacred writer urged his readers to carefully consider one's direction in life and to carefully proceed. In addition, it is noteworthy that not all diversions in life are overtly sinful. However, if they divert us from the will of God, they serve the same purpose. The chapter concludes with the wise advice, "remove thy foot from evil."

1Th 5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

1Th 5:22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

1Th 5:23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1Th 5:24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

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