

PROVERBS 11

PRIDE, GRACE, AND SOUL-WINNING

The proud and the lowly (verse 2)

“When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.”

Pride consists in an immoderate self-esteem, and it places its happiness in esteem and honor from others. No sin is more foolish than this – for it springs from ignorance of God, as well as of ourselves and other people; and by the very means which it uses for the accomplishments of its goals, it ensures disappointment. In seeking glory, it finds disgrace. Pride robbed Adam and Eve of Paradise. It turned Nebuchadnezzar into a beast. It destroyed Herod with worms. And it transformed Lucifer from an angel of light into Beelzebub! “Everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased.” The Lord puts to shame the person who refuses to stand upon the low ground on which He has placed him.

But humble persons, on the contrary, desire to see God honored, even at the expense of their own honor. And truly, “with the lowly is wisdom.” A splendor of wisdom shone in the humble child Jesus, when He was “sitting at the doctors’ feet, astonishing them at his understanding and his answers!” And will not this spirit be the path of wisdom to us also? For does not the Divine Teacher reveal to “the babes” what is hidden from “the wise and prudent”? (Matt. 11:25; 1 Cor. 1:27) Happy is that lowliness of spirit which approaches God’s written revelation and gracious Gospel without any will or mind of our own – humbly receiving what He is pleased to disclose; but willing (and even thankful!) to be ignorant, when He forbids us to intrude!

The honor of the gracious woman (verse 16)

“A gracious woman retaineth honor: and strong men retain riches.”

Here man and woman are set forth in a beautiful contrast: woman is gracious, and man is strong. Graciousness that is disassociated from strength does indeed have an influence all its own; while strength that is separated from graciousness is mere strength, and is lacking in all those attributes which excite and satisfy the deepest confidences of the world. A woman can speak a gentle word, and bestow a gracious look, and use the charming touch of friendship and trust, and carry her own way without appearing to do so – simply by the very force of tenderness, sympathy, and persuasiveness. But the excellency of Godliness adds something even more; it imparts unmatched loveliness, dignity, and influence to the female character! A gracious woman is not known by her outward beauty, but by her inner attractions, which remain in full luster when external accomplishments have faded away. And although she is “the weaker vessel,” she retains honor just as firmly as strong men retain riches, and preserves her character unblemished.

Who would raise the foolish question as to whether grace or strength is the more desirable attribute? Each is desirable in its own way; but together, they

make a combination that is the very perfection of character. Strength and beauty are found even in the house of the Lord! (Ps. 96:6) A great column looks all the better for the beautiful head which crowns and enriches it. The Bible has always given honor to the woman! He is a fool and an unjust man who wishes to keep women in silence, obscurity, and a state of unimportance; and she is a foolish woman who imagines that she cannot be gracious without being strong, and who wishes to sacrifice her graciousness to some empty reputation for worthless energy. It is not good for the man to be alone, for he is without grace; and it is not good for the woman to be alone, for she is without strength. But when men and women stand by one another, in the right Christian relationship, then each will complement the other; and together, they will constitute and display the Lord's own idea of humanity!

Soul-winning (verse 30)

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.”

The whole life of a righteous person – his influence, his prayers, his instruction, and his example – is a tree of life! And wisdom to win souls is his precious fruit. Although Jesus, Who purchased souls by His blood, is the only One Who can win them to Himself; yet He has set apart men who are dedicated to the work of drawing souls to Himself – sweetly gaining them, and making them a holy conquest to God. But this fruit – this wisdom – is not confined to Gospel-ministers alone! Do we love our Lord? Then let us arise and engage in this happy work, and He will honor us. Let us win our fellow-sinners to the ways of God by the patient energy of faith and love. The Christian who neglects his brother's salvation fearfully hazards his own! Such a person has gone back to his native selfishness; for his profession of faith does not exhibit an image of that “love and kindness of God, which hath appeared unto men.” What is the wisdom of the philosopher, the scholar, or the statesman, compared with this wisdom to *win souls*? If even one soul is won, the honor surpasses thought! No ambition is so great, and no results are so glorious. “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever!” (Dan. 12:3) Every soul that is won by this Wisdom will be a fresh jewel in the Savior's crown. It will be a polished stone in that Temple, in which He will be honored throughout eternity.

Lord, we pray for grace to labor diligently for You – endeavoring to win souls for You, which will be like so many jewels in Your crown – so that all nations, the world over, may know Your ways and see Your great salvation! (Ps. 67:2) Amen.

