

# Route Sixty-Six

*Part Twenty*

*Proverbs*

*Hidden Treasure of Wisdom*

*(John 5:39 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31)*

*With Study Questions*

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**You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).**

**And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:30, 31).**

## **Introduction**

When I was a child a television commercial aired that was so successful that it doubled the sales of the product it was endorsing. The lyrics of the little song went, "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz... (see if you know the rest). One of the reasons it doubled sales was due to the doubling of the dosage that the little jingle recommended. Up until this little ad campaign, the dosage was one tablet, but "plop, plop" perhaps unwittingly suggested two tablets. Another reason it was successful was due to the catchy nature of the song. The end of the song was "...oh what a relief it is." Of course, the product was Alka-Seltzer.

I find it moderately disquieting how many commercials, theme songs and rock songs are lodged in my head. I can only guess how much control this data has over me. It is not without cause that Paul writes,

**Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33).**

Or, as the Proverbs teach,

**Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm (Proverbs 13:20).**

One might argue that knowing the lyrics of a song or commercial is not companionship. But that would be a very short-sighted conclusion. What could possibly constitute more intimate companionship than inclusion in one's mind. And it is not mere inclusion but memory. As the saying goes, "We know it by heart." These things are in our hearts. Good things hidden in the heart produce that which is good. As the psalmist writes:

**Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You (Psalm 119:11).**

Conversely, bad things in the heart produce that which is sinful and destructive. God has accommodated our natural weakness in this area by providing Proverbs. Proverbs can be hidden in our hearts.

A proverb is a brief saying of condensed wisdom. The Proverbs catch our mind and are generally easy to remember because of the elegance of diction or the beauty of the rhetoric. But the brevity and depth of the Proverbs can, like parables, make them a bit difficult to understand. For example, a superficial look at Proverbs 26:4 and 5 appears paradoxical.

**Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him. <sup>5</sup> Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes (Proverbs 26:4, 5).**

Which is it? Do we answer the fool according to his folly or not? Yet deeper examination of these two verses unearths great value in how to engage in a fruitful conversation. Briefly, we are not to embrace an ungodly view of the world in an effort to persuade others. At the same time, there is value in understanding and showing the inconsistencies of a view of the world where God, and the things of God, are rejected.

Most of the Proverbs are written by Solomon but not all. There are the *Thirteen Sayings of Agur* (Proverbs 30) and the *Oracle of Lemuel's Mother* (Proverbs 31). Most of the Proverbs at *contrastive* where the first line is in

contrast to the second line, usually with the conjunction, “**but.**” For example:

**He who disdains instruction despises his own soul,  
But he who heeds rebuke gets understanding (Proverbs 15:32).**

Some Proverbs are *completive*, where the second line completes the thought of the first. An example would be:

**In the fear of the Lord *there is* strong confidence,  
And His children will have a place of refuge (Proverbs 14:26).**

Other Proverbs are *comparative* where a certain attribute or possession is compared to another:

**Better *is* a little with the fear of the Lord, Than great treasure  
with trouble.  
<sup>17</sup> Better *is* a dinner of herbs where love is, Than a fatted calf  
with hatred (Proverbs 15:16, 17).**

## Survey of Proverbs

Similar to the Psalms, a thorough survey of Proverbs is beyond a single sermon. Yet it does appear that the wisdom contained in Proverbs is in short supply. One need merely listen to interviews with people of high profile in our culture to grow despondent at the lack of prudence and understanding that prevails. Politicians, rock stars, movie celebrities, professional athletes, contemporary authors can instigate a bristling in our souls and a concern for the future of our children by the lack of judiciousness which the Proverbs supply.

The reason for this pandemic lack of wisdom and knowledge is cited early in Proverbs, then again in later chapters:

**The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7).**

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Proverbs 9:10).**

Succinctly put by Augustine...

*credo ut intelligam,*

...meaning, "I believe in order to understand." According to Proverbs, God is not found at the end of our studies, our studies can't even begin until we acknowledge and bow before the Lord.

For the first nine chapters of Proverbs there is the extolling of wisdom. This is communicated in many different ways, ways which I fear we all tend to ignore. There is the generational conveyance of wisdom from parents to children. This requires an already held wisdom on the part of the parents and eager, listening ears on the part of the children (Proverbs 1:8).

**Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, <sup>9</sup>for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck (Proverbs 1:8).**

This is in contradistinction to the very popular despising, rebelling and blaming of parents, along with many parents abandoning the role of being the primary source of wisdom for their children.

We also see a repetitive theme of shunning evil.

**My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent (Proverbs 1:10).**

This is taught with a warning of the consequences of those who choose the counsel of God's wisdom.

**Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, <sup>30</sup>would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, <sup>31</sup>therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices (Proverbs 1:29-31).**

Those who desire godless folly will find themselves ruled by it.

The Proverbs often direct our attention to women, both good and bad, both literally and metaphorically. It speaks of the **“forbidden woman...the adulterous with her smooth words...who forsakes the companion of her youth...and the covenant of her God”** (Proverbs 2:16, 17). We see here the tendency of those who go astray to isolate themselves from those who will seek to lovingly bring accountability. Sadly, this is a common theme in the church today.

There are numerous allusions to women as contentious, immoral, clamorous and willing to destroy their own house.

**The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down. (Proverbs 14:1).**

Yet other passages use women as a personification of wisdom

**Happy is the man *who* finds wisdom, And the man *who* gains understanding;<sup>14</sup> For her proceeds *are* better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold.<sup>15</sup> She is more precious than rubies, And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her (Proverbs 3:13-15).**

And, of course, the final chapter of Proverbs speaks of the inestimable value of a virtuous woman/ wife.

Laziness is addressed strongly and in detail in the Proverbs. No less than fifteen times in thirty-one chapters we see the word “lazy.”

**The desire of the lazy *man* kills him, For his hands refuse to labor (Proverbs 21:25).**

A people that accommodate laziness, a lack of willingness to work, will find that

**...poverty will come like a prowler, And your need like an armed man (Proverbs 24:34).**

Another repeated theme in Proverbs is the lack of restraint when it comes to words.

**In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise (Proverbs 10:19).**

It is not without a touch of humor that we read:

**Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. <sup>28</sup> Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent (Proverbs 17:27, 28).**

There is something to be said for being selective about when and where we might offer an opinion on a topic of which we may lack expertise. Gossip or “**talebearing**” is also a matter of much concern in Proverbs. In light of our current political pandemonium, it might also be worth giving an eye to the wisdom in the words:

**Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to *any* people (Proverbs 14:34).**

It is difficult, in a survey of Proverbs, to avoid the power and beauty of Proverbs 3:5, 6 or the warnings surrounding the seven things which God hates in Proverbs 6:16-19 or the unsearchable comfort of Proverbs 16:9 which interweaves the plans of man with the direction of God. But I would prefer to conclude with Proverbs 29:18, and how this points us to Christ.

### **Christ in Proverbs**

On an exterior wall of a local junior high attended by both of my older sisters, carved into the cement, were the words:

**Where there is no vision, the people perish.**

There was no reference as to where these words originated nor explanation of what they meant. I spent most of my young life thinking

these words meant that we must dream big. We must develop a vision for our future if we wish to thrive. I later discovered that that was not at all what those words mean.

There reference is from Proverbs 29:18 and is more suitably translated:

**Where *there is no revelation (hazon-prophetic vision), the people cast off restraint (yippara-unbridled) (Proverbs 29:18- parenthesis mine).***

In short, this Proverb is teaching us that where there is no word of God (since for us, the vision/revelation are the Scriptures), there is no hope for order in this life. And it is a short step to conclude that a more dire condition is that there will be no glory in the life to come.

Let us see if we can pull this all together. Without the word of God, there will be no fear of God. Without the fear of God, there will be no wisdom or understanding. And all of this results in disorder in this life and condemnation in the next. This unbridled condition is what Jesus walked into in His earthly ministry.

**When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things (Mark 6:34).**

The teaching of Christ brought order to their lives (not necessarily ease) and life to their souls. And this continues to this day for **“faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17)**. And the wisdom of Solomon will ever be rejected by those who would have nothing to do with Christ Jesus, **“who became to us wisdom from God” (1 Corinthians 1:30)**. For truly it is in Christ that **“all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden (Colossians 2:3)**.

## Questions for Study

1. Do you remember words, songs, sayings from your youth? Why do you suppose that is (page 2)?
2. What are the dangers or benefits of knowing things by heart (page 3)?
3. What is a Proverb? Are they always easy to understand? Why or why not (page 3)?
4. What are some of the different types of Proverbs (pages 3, 4)?
5. What must we know before we can have true knowledge or wisdom (pages 4, 5)?
6. Discuss some of the different topics covered in Proverbs. Which ones jump out at you and why (pages 5-7)?
7. What is true “vision” and where does one get it? What does it lead to (pages 7, 8)?