

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

PART FIVE – CHAPTERS 13-15 – NOW WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA?

In the last study, Solomon introduced us to a new way of Bible teaching. He offered short compelling two line ideas, most containing a striking contrast which increased their effect like putting a white figure on a black background. We found that five key ideas were used over and over again. First the encouragement to righteousness, right living; second the need for hard work; third the secret of being wise through listening to God; fourth the qualities of the inner person which result; and fifth the talk which comes from the heart of the wise person. These five headings are repeated but with variation many times in each chapter like a five note musical scale which become the ingredients of a beautiful melody. We used mind mapping to analyse each of the five ideas and to break them down further to uncover the depth of meaning. Finally we sought to put the whole chapter together to see how God was leading us through the day with each note playing over in our minds. We listen to Him, He changes our thinking, we live the way He wants, speak His wisdom to the world, and work hard.

Although each chapter repeats the same five ideas there is a different emphasis each time. In chapter 10 Solomon describes his hope for his son. In chapter 11 his theme emphasises the integrity and the compassionate honesty of the man who trusts God, not himself. In chapter 12 he hopes for a good marriage for his son.

Chapter thirteen plays yet another tune with the same five notes but there is a new theme which begins to emerge virtually for the first time in this book. Three times Solomon uses the word ‘discipline’ in relation to his son. In verse 1 he urges his son to accept rebuke when necessary by which he will become wise. In verse 18 he anticipates the poverty and shame which will come on the son who neglects discipline. In verse 24 he equates diligent discipline with a father loving a son. The importance of the father disciplining his son is developed further as we go on through Proverbs. The question which has generated much debate, particularly in recent years, arises from the frequent association of discipline with a rod.(19:18; 22:15; 23:13,14; 29:15,17) Does beating our children make them wise?

The Hebrew word for rod is ‘shebet, which is translated ‘tribe’ 126 times, ‘rod’ 27 times, ‘sceptre’ 12 times and various other words a further 7 times. The meaning ‘tribe’ is the key to understanding. Shebet symbolised authority as in the sceptre as a symbol of the rank of a king or chief which therefore reminded a group of people of their identity. It is not a weapon. The word discipline is linked in this chapter to the need for correction by rebuke. A parent is to correct a child by teaching him or her what God says. There is no definition anywhere in the Bible of the one method which works because the means of teaching and correction will vary greatly according to the age and temperament of the child. The one weapon in the armour of the Christian in Eph.6:17 is the word of God.

Chapter 14 begins with encouragement to a woman to be wise in the way she builds her house. Presumably this is talking about the relationships within the home and the manner in which tasks are organised rather than her choice of bricks. Verse 4 could be written with the

mistress of the house in mind. She loves everything to be spotlessly clean but there is a reminder that a healthy, active family will make a mess. Don't let your obsession with cleanliness make your home an uncomfortable place for a family to live in. Later the wise man is also acknowledged,(verse 16) because it takes a wise pair to make a home all that God intended it to be. A special theme of this chapter is our attitude to the poor. Those who are poor will be hated by neighbours probably because they are always asking to borrow.(verse 20) But this wise couple will be gracious to the poor, constantly looking for ways to help, rather than looking down on them.(verse 21) One of the ways the wise neighbours may help the poor is by giving them opportunity and encouragement to work.(verse 23) Again they are reminded how taking advantage of the poor rather than showing them grace makes a mockery of the God who created all of us.(verse 31) Once again throughout the chapter the wise, caring couple are urged to listen to God, let Him shape their character, their words, their lives and their work.

The same five ingredients are mixed into chapter 15 but again there is a new emphasis. Wisdom, as we have seen already, informs the tongue. The tongue is the most important way in which we teach. We are repeatedly urged to use it in this way to build others in their wisdom and knowledge of God. Very often in daily life in all kinds of situations the tongue has the opportunity to respond positively to anger and to resolve conflict. Verse 1 encourages us to respond to anger with gentleness rather than hitting back. A soothing or healing tongue can be life giving to those who are hurting.(verse 4) When the behaviour of others is wrong the tongue can be used to reprove, which is not telling others off, but convicting them with the appropriate word of God.(verse 5,10,12,31,32) Verse 18 describes the person slow to anger as being effective in calming a dispute. The Lord is the one who watches every situation and sees the hearts of those involved.(verse 3) If He can see even the place of the dead He can certainly see right through us.(verse 11) He also hears every word we say and especially the words we address to Him in prayer which He delights to answer.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How according to Solomon, in chapter 13, are parents to discipline their children? What do you suppose is the connection between disciplining a child and Christ disciplining us? Is discipline the same as punishment? What in your experience as a child, or possibly as a parent, works best is training children?
2. How according to chapter 14 will a wise woman and a wise man together build a Christ-honouring home? How will they respond to the poor around them? How does this work or fail to work in modern society?
3. In what way can our tongues be used to heal those who are angry and in conflict with each other? When according to Matt.18:15-20 should we be involved in others' disputes and with what objective? How do the five ingredients of every chapter of Proverbs help us to help those who are fighting? Share examples from your own observation of what happens when we apply the teaching of chapter 15.
4. Again choose a verse from each chapter which especially speaks to you, and seek to memorise it.