

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

PART THREE – CHAPTERS 5-9 – HOW CAN PARENTS KEEP THEIR KIDS SAFE?

In this next section Solomon continues to prepare his son for the proverbs which he trusts will shape his life for the future. His first warning about how we can miss out on the wisdom of God concerns the adulteress. He is teaching his son at two levels. First he wants his son's earthly marriage to remain faithful to one wife. This was advice he sadly forgot to listen to himself in his marriage to 700 women.(I Kings 11:1-8) Secondly this warning could be understood as a continuation of the illustration of wisdom as a good woman to whom we should always be uniquely committed. The harlot would then be all the other world views which try to seduce our minds supposedly offering something more exciting. This is exactly what happened with Solomon himself when his 700 wives turned his heart after other gods. The result however is not the sweetness the harlot promised but the bitterness of a life which goes badly wrong.(5:1-5)

The best way to avoid the temptation of the harlot is not even to go near her house in the first place. Do not even begin to look around at other claims to have attractive answers to life. The other 'children' your unfaithfulness could father will claim your estate when you die instead of you leaving a legacy which is fruitful and memorable. In old age you will become bitter and filled with regret if you become entangled with other claims to be truth.(5:6-14)

Flirting with other claims to wisdom will affect our marriages and families. Home life is the first place to be damaged. Remember too how Jesus warned that lustful thoughts are like adultery.(Matt.5:27-30) God knows what we think and warns us not even to dream of alternatives. Playing with false teaching even in our thoughts causes problems.(5:15-23)

Another of the ways we come under the control of the world around us is by debt. Those to whom we are financially chained can put limits on our lives which God did not intend. They demand that we see the world their way, share their kind of wisdom. As fast as possible get out of debt, Solomon urges his son. Then it will be easier to listen to God's plan for our lives. Hand in hand with dealing with debt is hard work which earns the money to meet our commitments. Putting a task off till tomorrow when times are good is the first step down this path. The ant spending the summer preparing for the winter has more sense than many of us. Body language can convey as powerful a message as the mouth. If we have chosen a path other than the wisdom of God we will use many ways to lead others astray. Solomon describes seven characteristics of the trouble maker.(6:1-19)

It is a dangerous world we live in. Parents worry what their kids are up to when they are out of sight. As they grow we cannot have them under constant surveillance so how do we keep them safe? The best protection is the word of God planted in their hearts which will shine out of them to show the way ahead and alert to danger. Solomon returns again to the image of the harlot. Sexual immorality is a powerful means of perverting young people. At the same time wrong teaching can seduce the mind of the immature. Parents

should be as concerned about the world's wisdom which is being dangled before their offspring as they are about seductive young ladies tempting their sons. Both ways destroy.(6:20-35)

Solomon continues to search for ways to impress his message about wisdom on his son. This time he uses the phrase 'the apple of your eye' which has become part of the English language. Literally 'apple' means pupil, in other words the centre of your eye through which you see the world and its problems and opportunities. Wisdom is to be our sister who keeps a motherly eye on a younger child by warning of danger.(7:1-5)

It becomes apparent why our big sister, wisdom, has to watch us and warn. Solomon now describes in colourful language the process of seduction by the harlot which parallels the process of wrong teaching luring and then trapping us in a destructive view of life. Notice that it is the simple who are the likely victims. Sadly this is the tragedy of so many lives. Let wisdom make us wise fast!(7:6-27)

Developing the theme of 1:20, wisdom again pleads in a public place to be listened to by the simple who might listen and the fools who probably won't. She promises to reveal what is right, true, straightforward and of immense value, far more than material things. She introduces her sister, prudence. Together they will protect us from evil actions, thoughts and words. They will guide decision making for everyone including those who govern. Seeking wisdom will always be fruitful and open up fairness and a richness in life beyond possessions. Creation was entirely the expression of God's wisdom. Her purpose was to create a world we could enjoy. Just as creation occurred day after day in Genesis 1, so we too need her every day. She is the source of life and blessing.(8:1-36)

The two women, wisdom and folly, are competing once more. Wisdom invites the simple into her house built with seven pillars offering the food which results in life. Trying to push wisdom on fools will only earn us abuse. Those who are looking to God alone will love to listen and keep on learning. Wisdom and folly both have consequences – life or death. Beware, folly will continue to lure us to her house! Choose carefully.(9:1-18)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What are the similarities between sexual unfaithfulness and believing wrong teaching? How do both affect marriage and family life?(chapter 5)
2. What damage can debt do to our relationship with God? How does it also affect family life? What solution does Solomon propose? How does it work? What is the most effective way to keep our teenagers safe in an unsafe world?(chapter 6)
3. What do physical and spiritual seduction have in common? What damage do they do? How can we avoid both?(chapter 7)
4. What benefits of wisdom are promised to us? Give examples of how creation illustrates the amazing wisdom of God.(chapter 8)
5. What is the 'bottom line' in comparing wisdom and folly? How can we persuade our young people – of any age – to choose God's wisdom?(chapter 9)