

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

### PART SEVEN – CHAPTERS 19-21 – THE PLAN OF GOD FOR LEADERS.

In the last three chapters Solomon put the choice before us of the plan of God or the plan of man.(chap.16) To make the choice even more obvious he concentrated for the moment on the consequence of our plan which is to go with folly, the woman who will destroy us.(chap.17) He went on to explore the most deadly aspect of folly, the mouth whose words corrupt, injure, separate and kill.(chap.18)

Now in chapter 19 he returns to the plan of God for our lives,(21) and the way it will affect those around us, particularly the poor and needy. This theme began in chapter 14 where we met the wise woman and the wise man whose loving home will minister to the poor. This time Solomon has much to say about the way the poor are treated by others, but the opportunity need in others provides to show the love of God. Sometimes in Proverbs there is the warning that poverty could be the result of laziness,(v.15,24) but verse 1 reminds us not to prize financial success above integrity, or telling the truth.(v.22)

Poverty is lonely according to verse 4 because no-one wants the company of a man with nothing to share, while everyone hangs around the wealthy man.(v.6) In his need the beggar seeks out those who could help, but they run away.(v.7) What he wishes for is someone who is generous,(v.6) and kind.(v.22) Those who do have are fearful to lend to the poor man because he will probably never be able to repay. Solomon has a great idea – regard your gift to the poor as a loan not to him but to God Himself who will reward bountifully.(v.17) Jesus said ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.’(Matt.5:7)

As usual Solomon advocates seeking the wisdom of God,(v.8,20,23) which will protect us from hasty decisions,(v.2) which we rush into and then have the cheek to blame God for when it all goes wrong!(v.3) To protect wealth or escape poverty we commonly lie,(v.22) sometimes even in court,(v.5,28) but there will be consequences for us.(v.9) God’s wisdom makes us patient and able to forgive.(v.11) Kings, or today more appropriately leaders, have a huge responsibility to use wealth wisely,(v.10) and to show grace to those in need, not anger.(v.12,19) Wise leadership begins in marriage and the family.(v.13,14,18,26,27)

As the king, Solomon increasingly speaks to himself about how his leadership should be in chapter 20. Our ministry if truly from God will address our own hearts as well as others. He has become aware of the problems which alcohol can get him into,(v.1) how dangerous his anger can be at such times,(v.2) and how wise everyone else will be if they keep away when he is like that.(v.3) He realises how much responsibility he carries to see that justice is done,(v.8) how important it is to have wise advice when there are battles of any kind to be fought,(v.18) how vital it is for him to deal strongly with evil but not as personal revenge,(v.22,26) and how powerful his own example will be in deciding his legacy.(v.28) He is aware how one area in which his example will lead others is in his preparedness to work hard,(v.13) although he would be the least likely to become poor. He knows too how easy it would be for him to be dishonest in business but how his example would set the tone for the whole country.(v.7,10,14,21,23) He understands how important mutual trust is in a leadership team.(v.6)

As always the same five notes are played over again in this chapter. Listen to God,(v.6,12) let Him show us our thinking about sin,(v.9) change our behaviour,(v.11,24) our speech,(v.15,19,20) and our work.(v.4)

Chapter 21 begins by acknowledging again the importance of the role of the leader by which Solomon means his own responsibility. He has learned that his heart is like the bed of a river, channelled out by God wherever He wants to take it. Psalm 65:9, written by his father David, would have reminded Solomon of how 'The stream of God is full of water.' It is the water of the Holy Spirit flowing where He wants which shapes us. It is great advice to let the river cut its own course.

In this chapter the king reviews the challenges and struggles of daily life for him and others. The first issue is always, who plans today, God or us?(v.2) His concern is always living right and treating others well, not religious ritual,(v.3) which springs from pride which will be written all over our faces.(v.4) His plan succeeds but our hurried or dishonest decisions can ruin us.(v.5,6,17) There is a sharp contrast between violence and crooked behaviour on the one hand and justice and uprightness on the other.(v.7,8,10,14,15)

Harmony in leadership starts at home as Solomon must have discovered with his many wives!(v.9,19) Wise words work on those who are open to God but sometimes only consequences, of which the final one is death, speak to the simple.(v.11,12,17) The poor cry out to us as we cry out to God. If we listen, He will.(v.13) God will redeem those who trust Him at the cost of those who refuse.(v.18; Isa.43:3,4) The wise will have rich resources of grace which will be expressed in an impressive life and the ability to overcome enormous obstacles.(v.20-22) Our mouths can get us into big trouble or keep us out of it.(v.23,24)

Solomon contrasts again the lazy man who wants everything handed to him and the righteous who delight to give.(v.25,26) Religious behaviour which does not spring from the heart is unacceptable to God(v.27) Liars die; those who hear and tell the truth live.(v.28) The difference is written all over our faces.(v.29) We cannot argue against God.(v.30) We do all we can to prepare ourselves for the battles of life, but it is so much simpler to trust God to deal with the challenges.(v.31)

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How does it feel to be poor according to chapter 19? Why is this? How do we respond to the needs of the poor? How does an appreciation of God's grace change our response? Do we have to be rich to be able to help the poor? Compare this with Paul's explanation in II Cor.8:1-9.
2. What according to chapter 20 are the marks of real Christian leadership? How did Solomon begin to be a wise leader?(I Kgs3:3-14) And when was he not a wise ruler?(I Kgs.11) Why is it vital for our ministry to speak to our own hearts before we have anything to say to others?
3. How might chapter 21 describe the many issues Solomon faced in a typical day at home and in his public leadership? How do some of them also picture our average day?
4. Again pick a verse in which God has especially spoken to you. Memorise it? Can you still remember the one from last week?