

Proverbs 1v4 Discretion

"To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion."

Our Bible class this week is again from the proverbs. We often return to this book for the pithy way it presents the behaviours and practises that should be seen evidenced in the lives of the faithful.

It is a book written under inspiration by King Solomon who reigned for 40 years and died before he was 60. Unusually his age is never given in the Bible. However, he did have a one-year old son when he started to reign, so he was a father who was aware that his example would be considered by others. Rehoboam sadly proved to be a big disappointment, but this does not distract from the wish of his father that this was not so.

How can proverbs give discretion? Discretion is defined as "to be discreet, circumspect in speech or action, especially to avoid social disgrace or embarrassment; tactful, trustworthy; unobtrusive; prudence, self-preservation. The Hebrew word used is Mezimmah, meaning device, intent, thought. In my Bible there is a marginal note against this word discretion given as advisement. Knowing how to behave publicly is a concern for those who are tempered by the Word.

Later in the Proverbs it is also found used in

Proverbs 2v11 Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.

3v21 My son let not them depart from thine eyes, keep sound wisdom and discretion, so shall they be life unto thy soul and grace to thy neck.

5v2 My son attend unto my wisdom and bow thine ear to my understanding: that thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge.

The chapter goes on to advise what should be done

Hear	A wise man will hear
Increase	and increase learning
Attain	and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels
Understand	to understand a proverb and the interpretation.

Is there a upwards pathway here of ascent from the mundane towards the celestial? If we do not listen, then the basic requirement of picking up the information can not even start. If we fill our heads with distractions before or during the meetings, then how will we be in a fit state to absorb the information the speaking brethren put over? If we do not concentrate will we really HEAR the word of God when it is read for us or we are asked to read it to all present?

The need to accumulate this information positively so that we increase in the ways of God. Learning by rote what the Bible says is greatly undervalued today. An old sister I remember who died in 1991 born two centuries ago, knew all the Psalms by heart. She was deemed uneducated because she had not been to university, indeed she was a housewife and not in paid work. However how many academic people have taken the time to increase their appreciation of the Word of God as she did? Being able to recall at will any Psalm at any time, how valuable is that? But that is just old-fashioned nonsense, we are far more advanced today! Really? Learning the Bible for oneself reveals the way to eternal life not a career, but it is not honoured as it should be by people today.

Achieving something by this accumulation of hearing and listening means we can attain something that really matters, grace in the eyes of the Eternal. Divine favour comes to those who lovingly submit to the ways of God. We know this but it must not be just a repeated phrase, head knowledge. If so, that is not discretion but a vacuous imitation of the ideal we must all aim for. Godly discretion then is having some idea how to behave according to the principles of the Truth.

Understanding is not head knowledge either, but the application of knowledge previously attained in a profitable direction. Talking about profit is not wrong. There is benefit in what we strive to do to serve God. Whilst we must not merely be selfishly motivated, when we consider God, we realise He is to obtain benefit out of all He puts His hands to, so it is only appropriate if others can do so also. Obtaining benefit or advantage is not something immoral but has its place. If there was no benefit in anything we did, then what would be the point? to serve some altruistic ideal that is remote from reality?

There is a chiasm in these early verses where there is a specific echo before and after a key thought or emphasis. In this passage the Chiasm is

V3 The instruction of wisdom

V4 Knowledge

V5 Wise

V6 to understand.... The key verse and emphasis of the poetic construction.

V6 Wise

V7 Knowledge

V7 Wisdom and instruction

Realising this adds some structure to the way the proverbs are presented and implies that they are not just single verse snippets or even phrase and counter phrase in thought but also have the construction of longer chains of meaning. We can build on this to increase our understanding as we apply ourselves to these helpful guides as to how to behave more acceptably in the eyes of the Eternal.

We were all at one time simple, if we listen, if we increase, if we hang on to what we learn then understanding will come and we shall be enabled to understand more of what God wants us to appreciate, to His Glory and honour, as His standards of righteousness are emphasised. That is true subtlety that will be well pleasing and worth striving after!