



GOD'S WISDOM IS BETTER THAN GOLD

"HOW MUCH BETTER IT IS
TO GET WISDOM THAN GOLD!"

PROVERBS 16:16

ADRIAN ROGERS



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INTRODUCTION

Here is a book on health, wealth, and wisdom. This subject will be greeted with mixed response. Doubtless, there will be those who hope it holds the key to Fort Knox and the Fountain of Youth rolled into one. I am sorry, but it doesn't!

There are others who may sneer, "Here comes another of the false *profits*. It's the health and wealth gospel of cash, Cadillacs, and comfort. He is going to tell us how to be a Christian with no sorrow or sickness in sight."

No, that is not the theme of this book. Anyone who can read the Bible ought to know that the demands of discipleship and the cost of commitment are clearly delineated. There is no cheap, easy, or lazy way to serve the Lord Jesus.

If indeed it is to be "all honey and no bees," as some of the "joy boys" teach on television, why did the apostle Paul say this?

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

If God wants everybody well, pray tell me, why did the apostle Paul, who had the apostolic gift of healing, leave Trophimus sick at Miletus, or have a thorn in the flesh himself? (See 2 Timothy 4:20; 2 Corinthians 12:7.)

Yet, having given these disclaimers about what this book will not offer you, let me urge you not to miss some of the most exciting and helpful principles in the Word of God, especially in the book of Proverbs.

These studies center primarily in the book of Proverbs, and the Proverbs indeed deal with health, wealth, and wisdom. There is no doubt about it. For example, look at some verses from Proverbs 3:

Health

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones. (vv. 7-8)

Wealth

Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine. (vv. 9-10)

Wisdom

My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights. (vv. 11-12)

The whole thing is brought into a clearer perspective and balance when we learn first of all what a proverb is. A proverb may be defined as a short sentence based on long experience. That is true with human proverbs and also with God's proverbs. But God's proverbs have the added dimension of divine inspiration.

So, these proverbs are gems of wisdom that are principles meant to be God's guide to living. Remember that they are just that—principles and guides. They are not meant to overrule any special plan that God may have for His saints. They are not meant to be ironclad contracts, but principles and guides.

For the Gospel's sake, we may suffer need and rejection, as I have already indicated. Having said that, let me also say that no Christian ought to suffer or fail unless he has ignored God's principles of health, wealth, and wisdom.

One more word is also needed. We need especially to consider what real health, wealth, and wisdom are. For example, Proverbs teaches this truth: not all that the world considers wealth really is. “There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches” (Proverbs 13:7).

This verse clearly teaches that what the world calls a rich man may indeed not be one. Let me say parenthetically that the unmarried woman reading this should remember what one wise man said: “It is better to marry a man worth a million who doesn’t have a cent, than to marry a man who has a million who isn’t worth a cent!”

When, therefore, could a rich man in the eyes of the world really be a poor man?

A rich man is a poor man when he seeks satisfaction in his money.

Well did Solomon say, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver...” (Ecclesiastes 5:10a). A man of modest means once commented to a wealthy business tycoon, “I am richer than you are because I have all the money I want and you don’t.” In fact, not to want something is even better than owning it.

A rich man is a poor man when his wealth increases his worries.

“In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble” (Proverbs 15:6).

It is clear that when supposed wealth becomes a burden rather than a blessing, it is not truly wealth. I heard of a man who was sitting on a train near a woman wearing a fantastically large diamond.

He asked the woman, “Pardon me, Madam. I don’t mean to be unduly rude or inquisitive, but that is a magnificent gem. Is it perhaps a famous diamond like the Hope Diamond?”

She replied, “No, it is not a well-known diamond like the Hope Diamond. It is the Klopman Diamond, but like the Hope Diamond, it comes with a curse for the person who wears it.”

“What kind of a curse?”

The woman answered, “Mr. Klopman!”

The rich man is poor when he becomes a slave to his money.

“Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease!” (Proverbs 23:4). “A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 28:20).

Money is a wonderful servant but a poor master. It is bad advice to say “Make all the money you can just so you make it honestly”. No one has the right to make all the money he or she can. If he does, he

will become a slave to his money. He will be making money when he ought to be doing something else. The man who has no time to play, laugh, love, serve, or worship God is not a rich man, no matter how much money he has.

The rich man is poor when he has no treasure in heaven.

“Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven” (Proverbs 23:5). If you want to know how rich you really are, add up all you have that money cannot buy, that death cannot take away. Some wag has quipped, “Money talks. It says good-bye.” This is quite true. If it doesn't say good-bye to us, one of these days we will say good-bye to it. Wealth that can be ultimately lost is not true wealth.

The rich man is poor if he dies a Christ-less death.

“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 11:4).

How poor the supposedly wealthy man will be at the judgment if he does not know Christ. His riches may have “fixed” a traffic ticket for him while he was on earth, but he will not bribe Heaven's Judge. Jesus pulled back the curtain of eternity and gave us a glimpse of one such “rich poor man.” “...The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments...” (Luke 16:22b-23a). It is obvious that his storehouse of treasure had become a storehouse of torment.

What we have seen about true wealth could also be said about health and wisdom. We must be certain to get “the real thing.” But remember that God loves you. He takes pleasure in the prosperity of His servants. He really does.

CHAPTER ONE

GOD'S WAY TO WISDOM

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion—a wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:1-7)

Can you imagine Almighty God appearing before you and asking, “Is there anything in the world you would like for Me to do for you? What do you want? It is yours for the asking”? For what would you ask Him? A hungry person might request food. An impoverished man might ask for wealth. An egomaniac might desire fame and power.

God did ask someone that question—King Solomon. “On that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, ‘Ask! What shall I give you?’” (2 Chronicles 1:7).

What an unparalleled opportunity! God laid it all out and instructed, “Solomon, take your pick. Whatever you want is yours for the asking.”

What did Solomon request? Fame? Fortune? Power? Pleasure? Women? No, even all of those later became his—and often to his embarrassment and shame.

He made a seemingly unspectacular request: “Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?” (2 Chronicles 1:10). And God answered,

Then God said to Solomon: “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life—but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king—wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like. (2 Chronicles 1:11-12)

Solomon asked for the right gift in the right manner. And the Book of Proverbs contains a collection of the wisdom God granted King Solomon three millennia ago.

A person may have every earned degree and course of study in every educational institution and still not possess wisdom. Wisdom is the capacity to assimilate and appropriate learning prudently. In the truest sense there is no genuine wisdom apart from God, because wisdom is seeing life from God's point of view.

THE INCOMPARABLE WORTH OF WISDOM

For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her. (Proverbs 8:11)

John W. Drakeford has written about “The Five Faces of Wisdom” (*Wisdom for Today's Family*), which are self-discipline (Proverbs 1:2a), understanding (1:2b), wise relationships (1:3a), planning (1:4b), and learning (1:5). God-based wisdom involves all of those and more.

No wonder God was pleased with Solomon's choice! Yet, what makes wisdom so priceless and desirable?

Wisdom Is the Purpose of the Father

Every father worth his salt desires wisdom for his sons and daughters. Solomon was no exception, as we recognize this passage of Scripture is from the king to his son. “My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you” (Proverbs 2:1). He wants his son to prosper, succeed, and find fulfillment, so he counsels, “Son, if you will only listen to your dad, I will show you how.”

These are still words for sons and daughters of the King. If you are a Christian, a child of the King, you believe this counsel is not merely the words of Solomon, but the words of God speaking His wisdom through Solomon. They are not only to Solomon’s sons but to God’s sons. They are wise words to the “King’s kids.”

Thus God has distilled this wisdom for us and graciously invites: “Come get it. Here it is. It is yours for the asking.” What a picture of His amazing grace!

Wisdom Is the Product of the Spirit

“To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom...” (Proverbs 1:2-3a). That is, there is to be a teacher. In the case of true wisdom, that instructor is the Holy Spirit of God, Whom the Bible calls “the Spirit of wisdom.”

Genuine wisdom is supernatural. So it is exceedingly important to understand the difference between wisdom and common sense, between wisdom and mere knowledge.

Common sense is natural. Some sage remarked, “Common sense is what keeps a horse from betting on a track meet.” But most everyone knows that is not even common sense—that’s just horse sense. But wisdom is neither. Wisdom is *uncommon* sense. It originated with God, resides in God, emanates from God, and is given as a gift from God.

The difference between wisdom and knowledge is this:

- Knowledge is needed to pass the test in school, but wisdom is needed to pass the test in life.
- Knowledge is learned; wisdom is given.
- Knowledge comes by looking *around*; wisdom comes by looking *up*.

- Knowledge comes by study; wisdom comes by meditation with God.
- Wisdom teaches one how to apply his knowledge.

But wisdom is not a substitute for knowledge, and knowledge is never a stand-in for wisdom. The Bible indicates that a wise person will study. Not long ago a young man requested, “Pray for me. I’m having exams.” I am not sure what his request meant. If he meant for me to pray that he would somehow know facts he had not studied, I certainly could not conscientiously pray that God would honor his laziness. No, what I prayed for was that God would give him the wisdom to study. Paul wrote, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed” (2 Timothy 2:15a).

Wisdom is not synonymous with knowledge. Rather, it is the product of the Spirit. Some things in life cannot be learned—those must be given.

Once there was a wealthy gold miner who had an intelligent son destined to take over the business and inherit the father’s fortune. The father sent his son back East to study in the finest engineering school and to learn all he could about managing the mines.

The young man studied hard and proudly received his degree and diploma. Returning to the mines he reported to his father, “Dad, I’m ready to go to work. Give me your best mine, and I’ll show you how to run it.”

The father replied, “No, Son, first you must change into your work clothes and go down into the mine. There you will gain experience. You may start at the bottom and work your way up.” But the son insisted, “Look, Father, I’ve been to school. I’ve received my diploma. I know more about mining than you will ever know, all due respects. And if you will just give me your best mine I will prove it to you.”

And so the father, against his better judgment, gave his son the most productive mine. For a while it did well. Then one day the father received a letter, stating, “Dad, you know that the mine I am working is backed up to the lake. Well, the water is seeping in. We’ve shored it up, but the shoring does not seem to hold. What do you think we ought to do?” The father did not answer.

In a few more weeks the son wrote again. “Look, Dad, this is serious. We are not able to stop the water. What do you think we ought to do?” Still no answer from the father.