

Obeying Wisdom's Commands

Proverbs 3

Proverbs 3 - *“My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands, for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.*

Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.

Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength^l to your bones.

Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase, so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

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 corrects the son in whom he delights.”

Background Notes

In Proverbs 2 we saw that following the way of wisdom in life is not automatic, and it is not easy. In fact, it requires great effort! However, it is well worthwhile, because it pleases God. And the benefits are great, even in this lifetime. More of these benefits and blessings for walking in the way of wisdom are found in Proverbs 3, but again we see that these benefits and blessings only come if we're willing to obey the **commands** of wisdom. That's another way of saying “walking in obedience to the Word of God.”

For that reason, this message addressed to “my son” is not just the wise counsel of Solomon to his sons, and in application the wise counsel of godly parents to their children. As the Word of God, it is wise counsel from God Himself to His family. And that's us! We are the sons of God. So as we go through this chapter (as well as the rest of the passages addressed to “my son”), don't think this wise counsel is just for the younger generation. It's God's Word to all of us!

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers receive wisdom's blessings when they obey wisdom's commands.

The first twelve verses are Hebrew poetry - six couplets of two verses each. The first verse of each pair gives the command of wisdom, and the second verse of the pair gives the blessing, or promise, of wisdom if the command is followed.

The command of verse 1, *"Don't forget the precepts of wisdom,"* is followed by the promise of a long and peaceful life in verse 2. The point here is not that godly people never die young, or they won't have problems, but following the precepts of wisdom is a principle for living a stress-free and anxiety-free life. Why? Because the person who walks in the way of wisdom recognizes that God is in charge of our lives! It's well known that stress and anxiety can shorten life. Although diet, exercise and rest are good principles for longer life, following the precepts of wisdom is the **best** principle.

If we practice kindness and truth (v3), we will find favor with God and man (v4). Here's the command: *"Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart."* Now the promised blessing: *"And so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man."*

What about the command in verse 5: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and don't depend on your own understanding"* and then the promised blessing in verse 6: *"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths"*? If we put the Lord #1 in our lives, and we don't have our own hidden agendas and desires, the Lord will guide us in His will for our lives, step by step.

In verses 7 and 8, again we see the close connection between spiritual health and physical health. For example, think of the many physical diseases connected with sinful lifestyles in the area of sex and drug abuse.

The command in verse 9 is to give to the Lord from our material possessions and our finances, and if we do, the Lord promises to meet our needs. The well will never run dry! *"Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine"* (v9-10).

And if we submit to the discipline of the Lord (v11), we have the promise that we will be a delight to the Lord, our Heavenly Father (v12). *"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 corrects the son in whom he delights."* Do these verses sound familiar? They're quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6. Believers receive wisdom's blessings when they obey wisdom's commands.

2. Believers appreciate wisdom's value when they follow wisdom's counsel

In Proverbs 3:13-35 we see the value of wisdom - and those who are willing to receive wise counsel will be able to appreciate it.

The value of wisdom is greater than gold, silver, or precious stones. *“Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her”* (v13-15). Would you agree? Or would you rather have the gold? If you say “Both!” you may be vulnerable to materialism. You may not be a materialist now, but you’re vulnerable to materialism.

Those who follow wisdom’s counsel come to appreciate that one of the values of wisdom is a principle for a stress-free and happier life, and thus a longer life (v16-18). Again, this does not mean that God won’t call on some believers to suffer physically, and some may even be martyred at a young age for the glory of God. Proverbs is speaking about the **norm**. *“Length of days is in her right hand; in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her”* (v16-18).

We can really appreciate God’s wisdom in verses 19-20 when we realize that this was the same wisdom that created the universe and controls all of nature, including the great Flood of Noah’s day: *“The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down :13-17dew.”*

When we follow the wisdom of God, that is readily available to us (James 3), we will appreciate the fact that we can sleep in peace, and walk each day in confidence and without fear. *“My son, let them not depart from your eyes. Keep sound wisdom and discretion, so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. Then you will walk safely in your way, and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid. Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; for the LORD will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught”* (v21-26).

In verses 27-365 there are several proverbs that give wise counsel and help us to appreciate the value of wisdom.

In verses 27-28, the idea is not charity, but paying back loans - whether money, or books, or tools. *“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. When you have it with you, do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go and come back. Tomorrow I will give it’”* (v27-28). Have you borrowed anything? Don’t forget to return it!

Romans 12:18 says, *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”* That’s also taught here in verses 29-30: *“Do not devise evil against your neighbor, for he dwells by you for safety’s sake. Do not strive with a man without cause, if he has done you no harm.”*

Would you say that Hollywood follows the way of wisdom? *“Do not envy violent people, or copy their ways. For the perverse person is detestable to the LORD, but His secret counsel is with the upright”* (v31-32). If anything, Hollywood has reversed those values. Violent, perverse, and wicked characters are exalted!

The behavior and mindset of parents ripples down to affect the entire family. *“The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the just”* (v33).

“Surely God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (v34). This proverb is quoted twice in the New Testament (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5), revealing how important it is to remember this truth!

Proverbs 2:35 tells us that in the end, those who are wise will reap what they have sown - mainly honor - and the foolish will reap what they have sown - mainly dishonor. *“The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the legacy of fools.”*

Believers appreciate wisdom’s value when they follow wisdom’s counsel.

Practical Application

You can know God’s will for your life!

Does the Lord have a plan for the believer’s life? Can we know what it is? It’s hard to read Proverbs 3: 5-6 and not conclude that God does indeed have a plan for our lives, and we can know what it is, step by step: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.”*

That’s another way of saying: If you put the Lord first in your life, and ask Him for His guidance (without having any selfish hidden agendas), and if you make your decisions in life using biblical guidelines, you will be following God’s plan for your life. And you will come to know it - with confidence!

But don’t expect to know it all at once. Living out God’s plan for our lives is a step-by-step walk along the way that our sovereign and omniscient Lord knows.

If our God knows everything and controls everything, and nothing happens “by chance,” can we not trust Him to lead us? Can we not believe that His promise that He will direct our paths (v6) is more than just giving us “general moral guidelines”? You can come to know God’s will for your life!