

Proverbs for the Family



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Introduction

The book of Proverbs is preeminently a book of the family. There are fifty-four references to it, in the thirty-one chapters which comprise this portion of scripture. Twenty-three times, the writer begins his remarks with the words, "My son." Because of the many forces which are at work to destroy the family in this age, and because some of the efforts of Christians to strengthen the family seem to be based primarily on the psychology of the world, it is imperative that we come again to God's eternal wisdom to learn His plan for the family.

May He give us the desire to do so, along with the Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of our understanding, enabling us to apply these principles to our situations.

The Husband

5:15, "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well."

The husband is to be faithful to his one wife throughout his life. Solomon learned the miseries of not doing this and described them for us in Ecclesiastes 7:26-28:

"And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account: Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found."

Among his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, he could not find a woman who would be true to him; he found only those whose hearts were "snares and nets, and her hands as bands." He tacitly confessed himself as a sinner who had not pleased God when he said, "the sinner shall be taken by her." After these bitter experiences, he gave good advice, which he surely wished that he himself had followed, in Eccl. 9:9:

"Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity . . ."

We note that he said, "the wife," not the wives! Also, he emphasized that this should be a life-long commitment, by twice saying that this should be done "all the days of the life of thy vanity."

If we look at these words merely from the human standpoint, forgetting inspiration for the moment, we should see the wisdom of heeding this man's advice which he had learned from years of experience with a thousand wives. It is always a wise man who learns at someone else's expense. Then when we remember that all scripture is inspired and profitable (II Tim. 3:16), these "words which the Holy Ghost teacheth" are potent and binding.

Ephesians 5:25-33 teaches the same thing: a man is to be faithful to his one wife, just as Christ is to His one bride, the church.

When the Lord said that the husband should "drink waters out of (his) own cistern," (Prov. 5:15), He was teaching that the man should not only be faithful, but satisfied. He continues that in verses 18-19:

"... rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love."

The idea of satisfaction is obvious. It implies that the man should guard against any outside influence which would make him think of the possibility that another woman might be more enjoyable. Many a man has made the serious mistake of comparing his wife to some actress or model which he has seen in the movies, or on television, or in magazines, forgetting that they are indeed **acting**. No wonder the scripture warns us against the "lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:15-16)!

That satisfaction is vitally connected with the physical relationship. Even the psychologists of the world have learned that a person's mental attitude toward the other determines whether or not the physical relationship is satisfactory and wholesome. God put that in His word

centuries ago!

Also, that satisfaction is to be continued even in old age. Note the words “the wife of thy youth” in v. 18, and the words “at all times . . . always” in v. 19.

Why would a man presumptuously embrace a stranger, knowing that the Lord sees it all? “And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.” (vv. 20-21)

How is all this possible? Simply by thinking toward the wife as God teaches us in this passage. The way a man thinks will determine the way he acts; “as he thinketh in his heart, so is he,” (23:7). This requires that a man know what God has said, make a commitment to obey it, and continually remind himself through the years to continue that obedience.

What are the benefits of such a commitment? Not only the obvious one of pleasing God by obeying His Word, but also that of having children who are a blessing to mankind, as rivers of waters are to thirsty land.

“Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets.” (v. 16).

The fact that this verse refers to children is seen by the Lord’s use of similar language in other verses, describing children as waters from a source and as playing in the streets. See Isa. 48:1; Hos. 13:15; and Zech. 8:5. Also, the word **fountain** refers to the wife, in Lev. 20:18.

When husband and wife are faithful to each other, they also have the joy of knowing that these children, which are as rivers of water to a thirsty land, are their own!

“Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of

waters in the streets.” (v. 16).

Another commitment which the husband must make regards that which is his priority in the home, as we learn from 15:16-17:

“Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”

The young man is pressured from all sides to succeed, and by that word, the world means to make more money and possess more things. If this becomes his priority, he faces the possibility of letting his work cause him to neglect his family; he could also be tempted to be dishonest in order to achieve them. To prevent these from happening, the Lord stresses two priorities in the above verses: the fear of the Lord, and love.

The fear of the Lord will keep a man from dishonesty; loving his wife will keep him from neglecting her. How simple all this sounds, and yet how very practical it is! Everyone knows that the family is being destroyed largely by greed and neglect. God showed us how to prevent that from happening, centuries ago, in these verses.

All of this implies that a choice must be made. It would be well for a man and woman to make these choices before the marriage, so that they both know what their priorities will be. What if we were to spend as much time and effort on learning the fear of God, and loving each other, as we spend on making money? It is easy to see that such would produce happy, spiritual marriages.

“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.” (18:22)

A man should seek a wife, not the other way around! A man should beware, when a woman “makes a play” for

him. That could be the wrong kind of woman. Even though this may sound old-fashioned, the clear implication of this verse is that the man should seek a wife. Of course, involved in this would be the man praying that God would guide him to the right woman to be his wife, and the woman doing likewise. The implication here is that the two are already following the Lord.

Obviously, this verse was not intended to teach that every marriage is a blessing of God. Some marriages are most unpleasant, as seen from 19:13 (“the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping”) and 25:24 (“It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.”). The verse describes the ideal, to which there are obvious exceptions. We must remember that Proverbs was written to teach us wisdom, etc. (1:1-6), not to describe every situation in the world. There are several verses in Proverbs which must be considered in this way; they describe the ideal situation, not every situation. As an example, let us consider 16:7:

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

There have been obvious exceptions to this, not only in biblical times, but also in church history. Daniel and the three Hebrew children are notable examples of those who pleased the Lord, but had to suffer at the hands of their enemies. Even though these men were eventually delivered, there were other godly people through the ages who were not; see Heb. 11:35-40.

Charles Bridges, in his commentary on Proverbs, made a wise comment on this verse: “the man of God . . . will always have his enemies, if from no other source, from ‘his own household.’ (Mat 10:36). To seek peace with them by compromise of principle, would be to forfeit his character at a dreadful cost. Let him hold fast his principles in the face

of his enemies.”

Rather than describing every situation in the world, this verse encourages us to please the Lord, by describing the reward of so doing. It was written “to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion,” (1:4). The same is true of 18:22; the implication is that the man has already learned to fear the Lord, as the previous chapters have instructed him, and that he is trusting in the Lord with all his heart, not leaning to his own understanding; in all his ways he is acknowledging him, expecting him to direct his paths (3:5-6).

If such is true, the Lord will guide the man to His choice of a wife, and so the man will indeed “obtain favor of the Lord.” It is wise for the man to remember this, when the inevitable times come that his wife displeases him in some way. Since we are still human, with the problems of the old nature, we can certainly expect to have problems with each other. Husbands and wives do displease each other; the problem comes when those instances are not treated in a scriptural way. When the wife displeases the husband, it will help him to forgive and/or tolerate her, if he remembers that she is God’s favor to him! The longer we associate with one another, the more characteristics we see about the other person which we do not like. Some of those characteristics will never change; they are inherently part of the personality. There is a great need for a lot of tolerance, in this matter of human relationships, especially in marriage. That is why Eph. 4:2 tells us to forbear (tolerate) one another in love, being kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us (4:32).

Quite similar to this verse is 19:14:

“House and riches are the inheritance of fathers;
and a prudent wife is from the Lord.”

A man should seek a prudent wife from the Lord, not from educational institutions, or social standing. Also, it is more important to have a prudent wife than a beautiful one (that is, if a choice must be made!). It is far too easy for a young man to be dazzled by physical beauty and not be able to see beyond it. We will probably never be able to escape the magnetism of physical beauty, but a young man had better associate with that beautiful girl long enough to find out whether she has any prudence, or not. After the marriage takes place, those mundane, daily responsibilities of paying the bills and keeping house can have a lot of influence on the happiness of the couple.

Suppose a man finds out, after the marriage, that his wife is not prudent? This, along with other deficiencies, can certainly be corrected by obeying the principles which are taught in Proverbs. Prudence can be learned. Both man and wife should seek the wisdom of scripture and pray, believingly, that the Lord will give it. He promised to do so, in such verses as James 1:5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

Two other verses showing a man what kind of wife to seek are 21:9 & 19:

"It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house . . . It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman."

A man's wife has far more influence on his happiness than his material possessions. So, he should spend more time choosing the right wife than in providing a house. To find her, it would be necessary to observe her under various circumstances. Then it would be easy to see whether she is a "brawler, or angry, or contentious."