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THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE.

Public education for everyone is a fairly new idea. Oh, it has been going strong for about 100 years, but that is a fairly short time in the history of man. We probably have the greatest access to educational opportunities as has ever been. In spite of that we are nation whose people are at risk to drug addiction, alcohol addiction, venereal disease, AIDS, being killed or maimed in automobile accidents, getting killed by someone who is angry because things didn't go his way, and who knows what else. We have developing around us a culture that is devoid of decency and morality and we can't seem to figure out why. Well maybe there is something missing in all that we do that could be the key to real success in the lives of people. Could it be that our education system has come to the point of nothing more than conveying facts to people rather than providing instruction in wisdom and knowledge of what life is all about. We are beginning a series of lessons from the Proverbs that will give us better insight as to what was recognized as important to one of the wisest men that ever lived.

¹The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: Proverbs 1:1 (NASB95)

Solomon lived in a time of peace and prosperity in the nation of Israel. He rode in on the coat tails of his father David and inherited a kingdom that was as great as Israel ever experienced. He was a wise man and even though he did not always practice the wisdom he knew, he shows great insight into the human character in these writings. Not all the Proverbs are written by Solomon; however, most are attributed to him.

²To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, ³To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity; ⁴To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion, ⁵A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, ⁶To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles. Proverbs 1:2-6 (NASB95)

The reasons the Proverbs were written are many and varied. The benefits include knowing what is wise. You can have all the facts of a situation and not be able to make the right choice of what you do with the facts. Having insight into what will be the probable consequences of our actions and then choosing the course of action that brings benefit to people rather than harm is what wisdom is all about.

What the KJV calls "instruction" the modern translations calls "discipline". One of the most glaring lack in our present culture (educational system, in the work place, in service clubs, or in church) is discipline. The consequences of a society that lacks discipline is that wisdom is missed as well as the insight into what is happening around us. Without these, a society will miss the mark in doing what is right and just and fair.

The teachings of the Proverbs are applicable to the young and the old. They are easy enough to understand that they can form the basis for starting young people out in the right direction. There is enough depth in the meaning that even the most wise and mature adults can continue to learn from them.

⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:7 (NASB95)

The first Proverb sets the tone for the collection of sayings. This shows the basic contrast between the wise and the foolish. Throughout this collection, there is a recurring contrast between the wise and the foolish. The first thing to learn is our place relative to God. We are answerable to the God of all creation and we should have respect for Who He is as well as what He says. The words that God gives us are words of wisdom and He calls us to a life of discipline. The thing that makes fools foolish is that they have no use of what God says and they certainly are not interested in exercising any discipline in their lives. Their attitude is "I want what I want and I want it now" and "If it feels good, do it."

⁸Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's teaching; ⁹Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head And ornaments about your neck. Proverbs 1:8-9 (NASB95)

The responsibility for training and educating children does not rest with the Public School System or the colleges and universities, it rests solely with the parents. Parents may include public or private schools and universities to help them, but the responsibility does not get transferred to the school when the child goes to school. One of the most important things for parents to realize is that the literature being used in our public schools is created by people who reject the basic values on which our country was founded and those that are advocated by the Bible. As a consequence, what they are taught in school will need to have correction and interpretation when the child is at home. If the child is going to a Christian school, then the parent still needs to be interacting with the child in reinforcing what is being taught about life and to show practical application so that the child realizes that the parent is practicing what is being taught and that what is being taught really works. If the parents are doing their job and the child is teachable, then he will grow up to be a valuable and contributing member of society and the wisdom and discipline he learned will grace his life and bring recognition and honor to him.

Notice the logic of the instruction that is given. First, is the foundation (respect for God), the second is how to build on the foundation and that is to follow the advice of godly parents, and the third is how to keep or maintain what you have.

¹⁰My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. ¹¹If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause; ¹²Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit; ¹³We will find all *kinds* of precious wealth, We will fill our houses with spoil; ¹⁴Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse," ¹⁵My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path, ¹⁶For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood. ¹⁷Indeed, it is useless to spread the *baited* net In the sight of any bird; ¹⁸But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives. ¹⁹So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence; It takes away the life of its possessors. Proverbs 1:10-19 (NASB95)

The most important people that influence the life of a young person is first of all his parents and next is his friends or peer group. The friends we choose can either enhance or degrade our spiritual lives and, in the case of our young people, can make the difference in success or failure and (quite literally) life or death. As a person matures, then the companion that is chosen as a spouse will have significant influence in a person's life. Sprinkled throughout this collection of sayings is a contrast given between two women: one is called Wisdom and the other is called various things (adulteress, prostitute, foreign or strange woman). These two may represent God's teachings versus the teaching of pagan religions; however, there is much to be learned regarding our conduct in the physical world from what is said about these two.

²⁰Wisdom shouts in the street, She lifts her voice in the square; ²¹At the head of the noisy *streets* she cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings: ²²"How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing And fools hate knowledge?" ²³"Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. Proverbs 1:20-23 (NASB95)

If wisdom represents the teaching of God's word, then we see that it is applicable in the streets as well as the sanctuary. It is needed in the business place and in the court room as well as the seminary and Bible school. Those that have insight can see in the many foolish things that are done in neighborhoods, schools, in business and in government that if people were simply practicing the Golden Rule and loving people rather than using them that things would go so much smoother in life. Following God and His way as revealed in Jesus Christ is truly the beginning of real knowledge. God wants us to turn from foolishness and embrace wisdom because He really does love us and wants what is best for us. If we want what is best for ourselves, then we will be agreeing with God.