

A String of Pearls

Prov 20:1-7

1

1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise. 2 The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life. 3 Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel. 4 The sluggard does not plow after the autumn, So he begs during the harvest and has nothing. 5 A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, But a man of understanding draws it out. 6 Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man? 7 A righteous man who walks in his integrity, How blessed are his sons after him.

This passage, these verses, take on the form of the parting statements of a mother or father to a child going away for college or leaving home for the first time. I vividly remember my mother sitting me down before I left for Florida and giving me this kind of talk. Don't wear dirty clothes, eat right, keep things picked up, and stay out of trouble. Dad was a little more direct, boy, God gave you a brain, use it, and don't make me come back there. Then I got to Scott's to pick him up and heard his mother telling him the same types of things and then she gives me a big hug and says, take care of my baby. I stood 6'2" and weighed maybe 120 lbs, I wasn't going to be much help to anyone. These types of thoughts are common to those that know they are going to be separated.

We don't know if Solomon was seeing his own impending demise or what the circumstances prompting these statements might have been. But we see in them and in the following chapters the thoughts of a concerned parent who wants his child to know some things to help in his life. These few statements are part of the string of pearls of wisdom that Solomon is giving to his son and in extension, us.

The first thought that he presents is the idea of temperance, control. Solomon uses wine and strong drink as examples of lack of control and he points out that when we allow those types of things to take control of us, we are acting foolishly. He paints the picture of wine as being a mocker. I see two ways to understand that. One is that the result of wine can be someone losing control and saying and doing things that they shouldn't. The other is that the wine itself is the mocker. It presents itself as being flavorful, relaxing, soothing to the disturbed spirit, but once in control, it becomes an enemy to the one who doesn't or can't control himself. He then illustrates strong drink as being raging. Brethren anytime we allow anything other than God and His word to be the controlling influence in our lives we are allowing Satan to be the primary influence in our lives and that is sin. The follower of Christ is to diligently seek to be the faithfully obedient child God wants us to be.

2 Peter 1:4-8

2

4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these

qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ

Intemperance, lack of self-control, is motivation for the insensitive, the companion of iniquity, and at the very root of sin. Look again at the caution Solomon advises...

3 *1* Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.

The word translated intoxicated, means errs, and is also translated as deceived in some versions. It is literally; staggers or reels, and maybe that's a better understanding of the word. When we allow anything to take control of us, alcohol, drugs, pornography, whatever, it is as if we are staggering through life with no secure foundation to stand on. Have you ever been on one of those rope bridges where they tie three ropes across the ravine and the idea is to walk on the bottom one while hanging on the two others? That is the idea. When under the influence of the lies of Satan the truth that is God's word is pushed to the back. Solomon defines that as being unwise. There is a world of quiet irony in the unexpectedly gentle close of his warning. That is not wise. The wise man retains control of his actions, words, and ultimately, his life.

Here then is the true sadness of the self-imposed commentary of anyone under the influence, it is the choice they have made. Where is the wisdom in that?

Solomon's next adage talks about things which most nations have now outgrown. But when thought about in terms of those in authority, it makes wonderful sense. The proverb warns that it is foolish to rouse the lion from his lair, and that when he begins to growl there is danger, the one who kicks against authority, kicks against a sharp goad.

Just this last week, the government shut down. National parks closed, people not getting paid, what a sad travesty that those who have been entrusted to guard the life that so many have fought and died for, that our taxes should be paying for, is brought to naught because of a difference of opinion among the lawmakers. Whatever side of the opinion might be right or that we fall on, there are people who are dependent on receiving their stipends to survive that are hurting. That isn't right.

Rom 13:3-5

4

3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; **4** for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. **5** Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

We watched a show the other day called the Dog Whisperer. The premise of what they teach the animals is how to have correct behavior. When the animal understands how to behave and does so, then there doesn't have to be fear for incorrect behavior. That's exactly what Paul is saying. There doesn't have to be fear when dealing with the authorities, if we learn how to have good behavior, "Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same."

8 **4** The sluggard does not plow after the autumn, So he begs during the harvest and has nothing.

This verse comes across as both a parable and a proverb. It is the old ant and grasshopper story. The ant works diligently all summer to store up food for the winter while the grasshopper does nothing and then comes to take the ants stores. So, as in life, if the time for preparation is neglected, then there is no reward later on. The student, who plays video games when they should be working, will probably fail during finals. It is useless to begin plowing for planting when your neighbors are harvesting. There is a time to sow, and a time to reap. God's law is absolute in nature, there are times when planting and harvesting must occur if the crop is to be successful, and His Law is just as absolute for the future life to come. The virgins who cried, Lord, Lord, open to us! and were answered, Too late, ye cannot enter now! are sisters of the man who was hindered from plowing because it was too cold, and then asked in vain for bread when harvest time came. To-day, if you would hear His voice calling come unto me, harden not your hearts.

Matt 13:41-43

9

41 "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, **42** and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **43** "Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

10 **5** A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, But a man of understanding draws it out.

The next proverb is really a piece of shrewd common sense. It sets before us some relevant common sense. Just because someone is quiet doesn't mean that they don't have some deep thoughts that may be very relevant. That is the idea that still waters run deep. The second part of the Proverb isn't a contrast but an extension of the first part. The man of understanding recognizes that everyone's opinion is important and may have some value to add to the situation. Wisdom dictates that all viewpoints need to be taken into account. All who would help their fellow man to love God and serve Him; preachers, teachers, and disciples of God, should use the wisdom of God to guide them in their teaching.

11 **6** Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man?

It is passages like this that make it fun to read the different commentaries. The first part of the verse is viewed by some as talking about the deeds of a man defining his loyalty or trustworthiness, and that it is difficult to find a man who is indeed trustworthy. The other viewpoint, and frankly, the one I tend to lean towards, is that many people will laud their own knowledge, experience, understanding, being more than willing to share with all their vast qualifications, but when push comes to shove, "A trustworthy man is hard to find."

The practical conclusion from the facts in this proverb is double—do not pay too much attention to anyone's self-aggrandizement; and in the same vein, be careful trumpeting your own praises. Caution and modesty are parts of Christian perfection.

12 **7** A righteous man who walks in his integrity, How blessed are his sons after him.

Solomon brings this section of his pearls of wisdom to a close with this truism. A righteous man, this is a man who is walking God's Word, pursues that walk with integrity, honesty. This honesty has its impact in two ways, one is in regards to the standard, God's Word, the other is to how he applies that word in his life. Paul says in...

2 Cor 1:12

13

12 For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

We must be true to ourselves in our daily walk, doing those things that we trust in and avoiding those that we don't. The caveat is that the things we trust in are in and of themselves righteous in God's eyes. Paul persecuted Christians in all good conscience but was wrong in doing so.

The righteous man who walks in integrity to himself but more importantly, to God's truth, leaves behind him, wherever he goes, a legacy of truly following God.

The real impact of Solomon's statement is the inheritance given to our children. What greater peace of mind can any parent have than to know that they are leaving their children with a faith in God and an understanding that it is only through Christ that true integrity can be found. And note this, if you get nothing else from this lesson, get this; our children, above anyone else, know if we are honest in our approach to and application of the Gospel. They know if we are faithfully obedient, they know if we are just playing games. And they will react, in their own right, to God, based, at least in part, on what they know of our relationship with God. If we have responded with integrity and truth, that will help show how an honest disciple should respond. If we cheat and lie and are dishonest with God's truth, then they will think having a relationship with God is just a game to be played.

If you give your children, family, friends nothing else, give them a picture of what an honest Christian should look like.

- 14** 1) Don't let anything other than God be in control of you
- 15** 2) Do what is right
- 16** 3) Avoid strife, fools look for trouble
- 17** 4) Work hard, don't be a sluggard
- 18** 5) Be mindful of others and their thoughts
- 19** 6) Be careful of those who blow their own horn, and don't be a braggart
- 20** 7) Our righteousness is directly related to our honesty concerning God's Word