

Text: various

We are repeating lessons I gave many years ago on Proverbs.

This one goes back to Aug 26, 2012.

One of the ways of approaching Proverbs is to use it to do a topical study of its wisdom – you isolate passages that relate to your topic and gain insight into Solomon’s approach to the subject.

Many of the commentaries offer studies of this kind in their introductory sections, but the best of these are found in Phillips, Longman, and Kidner, with Kidner being the champion of them all.

For this lesson, I want to begin to teach topical method by using the first topical study from Kidner as my template. Kidner calls this topic, “God and man.”¹

Kidner begins the topic this way:

“When we open the book of Proverbs at random and take samples of its wisdom, we may gain the impression that its religious content is thin and indefinite. Many of its maxims and theological assertions would translate into non-Israelite, non-biblical soil, and we are tempted to ask whether anything as specific as a covenant-relationship with God is presupposed here. A hostile reader might go even further, and ask whether the real God and master in this book is not man himself, and the real goal prosperity.”²

A couple of Proverbs that could fit into a ‘non-Israelite’ world:

Pr 12.8 A man will be praised according to his insight, But one of perverse mind will be despised.

Pr 29.24 He who is a partner with a thief hates his own life; He hears the oath but tells nothing.

Many others are like this.

To answer the question, it isn’t enough to simply cite the ‘fear of the Lord’ passages and move on, “for this could be itself a mere counsel of prudence, a crowning example of a policy of cultivating the powers that be.”³

¹ “God and man” Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 17 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), 29–33.

² Kidner, 29.

³ Kidner, 29–30.

Kidner's development of this theme begins with the morality of Proverbs and moves from there to a close personal relationship with God before letting us get back into our day to day lives.

I. The relationship of prudence to morality

Kidner: "The moral factors always take precedence. To be sure, Proverbs is concerned to point out that what is right and what pays may travel long distances together; but it leaves us in no doubt which we are to follow when their paths diverge."⁴

A. Example: Gifts and Bribes, Pr 18.16; 17.23

Pr 18.16 A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.

Pr 17.23 A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom To pervert the ways of justice.

1. "gift" = monetary contribution (like lobbying, in this context)
2. But a gift becomes a bribe when you cross the line to beat the system

B. Analyzing the difference

1. "You have to be good to be wise" [Kidner means morally good here.]
2. "You have to be wise to be really good"
3. "You have to be *godly* to be wise"⁵

II. The reality of God as seen by the sense of sin

A. Humility of a wise heart, seeing itself (20.9)

Pr 20.9 Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin"?

1. Not the 'servile uneasiness' of the Gentiles

"God, known or unknown — my transgressions are many ... the transgression I have committed — I know not ... Whether one does wrong or right one knows not"⁶

⁴ Kidner, 30.

⁵ These three quotations from Kidner, 30.

⁶ A Sumerian Prayer to God, 11.24, 26, 53; DOTT, pp. 113-114, quoted by Kidner, 30.

2. Seen in zeal to know and do the will of God [accountability] (24.11-12)

Pr 24.11-12 Deliver those who are being taken away to death, And those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold *them* back. ¹² If you say, "See, we did not know this," Does He not consider *it* who weighs the hearts? And does He not know *it* who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?

B. No evasions allowed (28.9, 15.8, 21.27)

Pr 28.9 He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.

Pr 15.8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

Pr 21.27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!

C. Requirements of repentance and confession (28.13)

Pr 28.13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

"In a word, there are no subpersonal transactions."⁷

III. The relationship with God more than moralistic theism

A. Seen in the proverbs that mention God (about 100)

1. All but 12 of these use YHWH, the covenant name of God
2. Relationship assumed
 - a. Man's side: 'filial' [that is, "like a son"]
 - b. God's side: 'faithful and self-revealing'⁸

B. Fear of the Lord (1.7 and about 16 times total) means more than simply 'healthy respect' for God

⁷ Kidner, 31.

⁸ Kidner, 31.

Pr 1.7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

1. Synonymous with 'knowledge of God' (2.5, 9.10)

Pr 2.5 Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover
the knowledge of God.

Pr 9.10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And
the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

2. Gained by revelation (2.6)

Pr 2.6 For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth *come*
knowledge and understanding.

3. Fostered by personal cultivation (3.5, lit., acknowledge = 'know him')

Pr 3.5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on
your own understanding.

C. More than reverence and obedience, but also *trust* (3.5)

Pr 3.5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on
your own understanding.

1. Puts wisdom in its proper place (3.7)

Pr 3.7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and
turn away from evil.

2. Planning recommended, but trust dependent (20.18, 19.21)

Pr 20.18 Prepare plans by consultation, And make war by wise
guidance.

Pr 19.21 Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of
the LORD will stand.

D. The institutions of Israelite religion are assumed

1. Prayer and sacrifice (21.3)

Pr 21.3 To do righteousness and justice Is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice.

2. Revelation [law] (28.4, 29.18)

Pr 28.4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But those who keep the law strive with them.

Pr 29.18 Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, But happy is he who keeps the law.

IV. The place of religion in Proverbs and life

A. In picking out passages like these, we are being very selective

“the explicitly religious material has to be hand-picked from a large mass of sayings in which religion is only implicit.”⁹

B. Rather than overtly religious, Proverbs puts ‘godliness in working clothes’

“And we should do Proverbs a poor service if we contrived to vest it in a priestly ephod or a prophet’s mantle, for it is a book which seldom takes you to church. Like its own figure of Wisdom, it calls across to you in the street about some everyday matter, or points things out at home. Its function in Scripture is to put godliness in working clothes; to name business and society as spheres in which we are to acquit ourselves with credit to our Lord, and in which we are to look for his training.”¹⁰

Conclusion:

Is your religion in ‘working clothes’ through the week? Or do you live a secular life outside the walls of the church?

How do you invest your working clothes with godliness?

- By experiencing and interpreting the hard knocks of life correctly

⁹ Kidner, 33.

¹⁰ Kidner, 33.

- By hearing and heeding the revelation of God in his word, including Proverbs