

Proverbs Week #108 (11:16-19)

“A gracious woman attains honor, and ruthless men attain riches. The merciful man does himself good, but the cruel man does himself harm. The wicked earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness gets a true reward. He who is steadfast in righteousness will attain to life, and he who pursues evil will bring about his own death.”

Proverbs 11:16-19

In these proverbs we hear matters of honor, riches, doing oneself good or harm, wages that are deceptive, and receiving true rewards. The end of this chapter compares those who “attain to life” with those who bring about their “own death.” Many troubles we have in life are self-afflicted. We get in trouble because we say or do things we shouldn’t. Now this applies to young and old, wise and foolish, and boys and girls. We want to be able to blame others, but it is very possible that some of the pain, stress, sadness, and frustration we experience are the result of our bad choices.

To Learn Wisdom and Instruction: Some things in life take time to develop or finish. If we are learning to speak a new language, play an instrument, or solve complex math problems, the skill we need to learn may take time to acquire. It is also true in our relationship and discipleship with God. It takes time to learn all the things we need to know to attain honor, riches, and true rewards.

“Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.” Proverbs 3:16

To Discern Wise Counsel: The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in the Messiah Yeshua (Rom 6:23). No one wants to pick up the paycheck that results from a life of sin. Anyone who is wise would seek instead to find God’s gracious gift. How can we learn to tell the difference between God’s gifts that lead to life and living a life without Him?

To Receive Moral Instruction in Skillful Living: The skills needed to receive anything from God (if they can be called skills) depend first and foremost upon us receiving Him and His instructions. According to God we are saved by grace through faith and that these are gifts from God (Eph 2:8.9). We learn from the writer of Hebrews that “without faith it is impossible to please God.” We are faithful and love God because He is faithful and loves us first (1 Jn 4:19; 2 Tim 2:13). Wisdom teaches us that the very definitions of what is good, honorable, and rewarding must be seen from the perspective of God’s righteousness. The right way to do anything is based upon the standards God outlines for His family. Through the Messiah we all become part of His family. We are to do things righteously because that is what God’s family does.

To Impart Shrewdness to the Naive: I mentioned earlier that some things we need to learn will take time. Even Yeshua grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). Emmanuel (God with us) was born into this world as a child. The lessons He learned took time and experience to understand and apply. We should not think of Yeshua as some computer or robot who just was able to know everything automatically. He lived his life in a household with a mother and father, an extended family, and a community surrounding Him. Those things that are common in families He experienced. People woke up having good and bad days. He laughed, cried, was hungry, and experienced all the emotions and frustrations common to us all.

We learn from His example that it is possible to trust in God and live faithfully in spite of all of life’s distractions. We can live our lives differently because God wants to fill our lives with Himself. Does that make sense? Paul said, “. . . the Messiah lives in me.” (Gal 2:20). The life Paul lived was no longer based upon just his own identity. He was living a life based upon the love that God demonstrated to Him. The life was so marked by God’s love that it changed the whole way he looked at life. He saw in the sacrifice (crucifixion) of Yeshua a lesson so important that it changed the whole way he saw himself. Paul was a grown man when he “discovered” these truths. God had a plan for Paul that Paul didn’t anticipate or expect. Do you think God has a plan for your life? Is it likely to surprise you when you hear it or are you learning enough about your Maker to have a pretty good idea what He has planned for you?