

Proverbs Week #117 (12:4)

"An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is like rotteness in his bones."
Proverbs 12:4

Paul teaches Timothy four things that scripture does (2 Tim 3:16, 17). Scripture teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains. The purpose for these four things is also given in the verse. The result of scripture "doing its job" will be that the believer will be thoroughly equipped. Wisdom literature fulfills its part in this growth process, and if we are wise we learn from what we hear. In hermeneutics (reading the Bible correctly following rules of language and cultural context) we read the genre of wisdom literature differently than narrative, prophetic, or apocalyptic. This proverbial statement (as do most proverbs) packs a punch. A wise person will handle this with care. It should not be used to punch people.

As we approach the subject of marriage, we should remember that before sin entered the world God created mankind according to a plan and design.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them... God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.'" Gen. 1: 26, 27, 31

The verse we have from Proverbs speaks of the qualities of an "excellent wife" and "she who shames" and compares their results to a crown on a head and rotteness in the bones. As a proverb it seems one-sided. I doesn't appear to say anything about the husband. Much of our culture as well as our pride turns godly relationships into competitions. Is it possible to read this verse and not get into a fight? I think we can.

The *Eshet Chayil* (women of valor) was what the people in the gates knew Ruth to be. These were the words Boaz said to her when he blessed her and told her not to be afraid. Ruth may have considered herself to be insignificant and the last person whom God would bless and make a part of His people. She would become in Israel the great-grandmother of King David. She was a crown on the head of Boaz.

To Learn Wisdom and Instruction: Much of the context of the book of Proverbs is a father teaching his son. Today's verse gives advice in regards to a wife. Considering that a king wrote the book it is fitting that the imagery of a crown be used as the symbol of proper nobility.

To Receive Moral Instruction: The son's willingness to receive this instruction will be demonstrated if he marries. The wise son learns that the fear of the Lord begins his journey in wisdom. This is also true of the *Eshet Chayil*.

"Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised." Proverbs 31:30

To Impart Shrewdness or Moral Skills: This verse doesn't give us a checklist on how to find an excellent wife, how to be a man of God worthy of such a woman, or how to maintain a happy marriage. The skills needed to properly understand and apply the wisdom in this verse will need to be found elsewhere in scripture. I believe the shrewdness to be gained is best found as we strengthen our own relationship with God, and as we are reminded of the examples provided by fellow believers who have faithfully loved God and their spouse. Not all sons and daughters will marry. God does not command everyone to marry. When and if they do marry, God can bless the union and strengthen it as each one grows in their understanding and appreciation for His love.

To Discern Wise Counsel: Simply put, crowns are good things and rotteness is bad. During the French Revolution crowns were despised and nobility often had no head upon which to put a crown. While abuse of authority can make us want to rebel, we should never rebel against God's authority. His love and grace draw us to Him. It is only when men and women have a proper respect for God that we can learn to live well with each other.