

Proverbs Week #119 (12:9)

"A person is praised in accordance with his wisdom, but the one who has a twisted mind is despised. Better is a person of humble standing who nevertheless has a servant, than one who pretends to be somebody important yet has no food. A righteous person cares for the life of his animal, but even the most compassionate acts of the wicked are cruel. The one who works his field will have plenty of food, but whoever chases daydreams lacks wisdom. The wicked person desires a stronghold, but the righteous root endures." (Proverbs 12:8–12 NET)

While I want to focus just on verse nine, I presented the larger context to ensure we understand the advice that is given in today's verse. These verses contrast the characteristics of those who are wise with those who lack wisdom. These proverbs are rooted in life on the land and teach the youth to consider the importance of applying wisdom to practical needs. They address owning a slave (we might compare this to hiring an employee), caring for animals, working the fields, and building a strong house. A wise father teaches his son to recognize that others will notice each of these areas and his image or reputation in the community will be determined by his actions or lack of actions in regards to them. One who is wise does not just know the right things to do; they do them and validate their own wisdom by looking at what kinds of fruit it produces in their lives.

Verse 9 presents the concepts of humility and pride. As a rule, those who are wise are not to be wise in their own eyes (Proverbs 3:7). Pretending to be better than others is not the way of wisdom. Those who are wise understand the importance of wisdom and apply the lessons learned to life. They are not content with other people just thinking them to be wise, they actually want to be wise in the things they do.

To Learn Wisdom and Instruction: *"The petty person unwisely spends his sparse resources to keep up a vain show. Some folk pretend competence but in fact are incompetent, and some pretend to be religious but in reality are spiritually bankrupt."¹*

As we hear the words of these proverbs they should cause us to remember the importance of being in right standing before God and others. God doesn't want us to have to pretend to be someone important, he wants us to understand our importance in His eyes.

To Receive Moral Instruction: Sometimes we feel bad about who we are and we don't always think of ourselves as important. God has a solution to this problem and it is not always easy to receive His help. If we feel bad about how we have acted or are acting, by God's grace, we need to stop doing what we know to be wrong and repent. In this case, we must learn new ways of thinking and living. This really is the heart of wisdom. When we find ourselves in the wrong, we are to acknowledge this to God (and others when necessary) and seek His wisdom (ask for it).

To Impart Shrewdness or Moral Skills to the Naive: Yeshua speaks of the commitment we need to be "fit for the kingdom." Some lessons need to be learned right away and others may take time for us to mature and understand the significance of the lesson.

"Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Yeshua said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Luke 9:61–10:2 NAS95)

To Discern Wise Counsel: What is Yeshua saying in these verses from Luke? How do they fit in with the whole counsel of scripture? We know that Yeshua would not teach against honoring a father and mother. Whatever He was teaching here needs to be understood with wisdom. The hard point is that He declares a condition of someone who "is not fit for the kingdom." Like Wisdom, He warns that there is a way that seems right to a man that ends in death (Proverbs 14:12). Learning to know the difference between what seems to be right and what is right is one of the goals of wisdom.

¹ Waltke, Bruce K. The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Accordance electronic edition, version 1.0. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.