

Proverbs Week #43 (4:14-17)

“Do not enter the path of the wicked or walk in the way of those who are evil. Avoid it, do not go on it; turn away from it, and go on. For they cannot sleep unless they cause harm; they are robbed of sleep until they make someone stumble. For they eat bread gained from wickedness and drink wine obtained from violence.”

Prov 4:14-17

Last week my lesson focused on taking hold of instruction (or more precisely discipline). I talked about how levels of discipline might apply in a military setting, business setting, in families, and in our community. I wanted to relate the skills of wisdom to how we live our lives. I wanted to say that as disciples of Yeshua we should devote our lives to the things that are most important to Him. We can learn these things as we continue to study the Bible and we should seek for greatness in His eyes. In the scriptures I gave as references for further study, Yeshua taught that those who are great in God’s eyes are those who serve, those who do and teach all that the Bible declares, those who humble themselves like a child, and those who are least in the community.

While last week we focused upon a way of life that should be embraced with complete devotion, today’s verses describe a path or a way of walking in life that should be completely avoided. They describe for us a type of person who is wicked and evil and tell us a little about these kinds of people. When we started our study in Proverbs we learned different reasons for studying wisdom and one thing we learned was that wisdom gives prudence or discretion to those who are young (Prov 1:4). How do we learn what these two words mean? How do we remember these lessons? How do we learn to discern a good person from a bad one? If we are not to join in the ways of the wicked or evil people how do we know who they are?

Today’s verses give us at least two areas to look for in order to discern good people from bad and good ways from bad ones. First, they say that these people lose sleep over causing others to stumble. Have you ever had something on your mind so much that you couldn’t sleep? Sometimes we are worried about things or we want something so badly that we can’t get it off our minds. Now these kinds of thoughts may not be the same as those who can’t sleep until they do evil, but they are the same in that they show a level of devotion or commitment. Evil is not always easy to discern. The people that this verse describes may not know that they are seeking to cause people to stumble. They may even be thinking that they are even doing important things for God – religious things. Yeshua said, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”* (Matt 23:15) The religious people that Yeshua here rebuked and taught were hypocrites (actors) who put on a show of being righteous but on the inside they were evil. How can we discern whether someone is the real thing or just acting? The first test is the result of their actions on others. They have a strong devotion to leading others but they lead them in ways that are harmful and cause them to stumble in regard to what is true. So a devotion to seek to understand God’s truth and how it is applied is needed to guard you from these people.

Next, our verses add characteristics of these evil and wicked people in regard to how they work. The food they eat and the wine they drink is gained by wickedness and violence. In this way you can learn something about them by their chosen professions. Some have said that you can learn a lot about people if you “follow the money.” By this they mean, someone’s true motives can often be found if you uncover who is giving them support. This can be easily seen if it is uncovered that a “humanitarian group” is being completely funded by terrorist organizations or when a charity that presents itself as purely humanitarian has suicide bombers as the final consumer of all donated funds. As children though, you need to learn to apply these obvious, large scale examples of wickedness and evil to your everyday life. Parents, this is where you come in. You know your children best. I encourage you to continue to impress these lessons in the hearts and minds of your children.