

Proverbs Week #70 (6:30-35)

Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry; but when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; He must give all the substance of his house. The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it. Wounds and disgrace he will find, and his reproach will not be blotted out. For jealousy enrages a man, and he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not accept any ransom, nor will he be satisfied though you give many gifts. Prov 6:30-35

What a contrast! How important is a person's "stuff" compared to their spouse? From the point of view of wisdom a thief can steal and may find a way for restoration. However, if a person violates the sanctity of a marriage, no gift or ransom can settle the jealousy or rage that this act creates. Now it is true that forgiveness can be found for even the greatest of sins, but that is not the emphasis here. Today's passage cries out, "Marriage is important!" As we read last week, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (Matt 19:6)

The first question that might be raised from this passage is why does it say a sevenfold payment is required when a thief is found? Doesn't the Torah teach that man must pay back double? (... if the thief is caught, he shall pay double. Exo 22:7) "Seven times" should here be understood as a full compensation (see also Gen. 4:15; Lev. 26:28; and Matt. 18:21–22). Wisdom teaches that a thief must make full restitution, but one who commits adultery should not expect to be spared "in the day of vengeance." Like many other proverbs we are warned and exhorted to learn from these lessons **before** these kind of grave errors are made.

The moral failure here is described as "lack of heart" or literally חֵסֶד לֵב and we are told that one who fails in this "destroys himself." This direct phrase occurs 11 times in the book of Proverbs. It describes the naïve one who is easily persuaded by folly (Prov 7:7, 9:4, and 9:16). It is said of this fool that "the rod is for the back of him" (Prov 10:21). A sluggard, a man who despises his neighbor (and speaks badly about him), and one who finds joy in folly are all said to have this condition.

What is the remedy for this fallen position? How is one "lacking of heart" to become wise? You might guess the answer I am going to give. The solution is to seek wisdom. We need to continue to pursue it and learn from what it has to teach. We need to develop in ourselves, our families, and our community a continual tendency to learn what is important in God's eyes. To be wise we must not spend our lives doing what is right in our own eyes, and we must teach also our children not to live by this false approach. We must continue to participate with God in writing His Torah on our hearts. He is the one who gives a new heart and He is the one who writes His ways on His children's hearts. We are admonished not to harden our hearts to God's teaching and not to grieve His Holy Spirit. Who is to blame if our hearts are hard and we are not wise?

We have been talking lately about the tendency of fallen man to shift blame. How easy it is for any one of us to think that the troubles in our lives are the fault of anyone other than ourselves. I do not suggest that all of life's difficulties should be seen as self-imposed, but in this instance and in many others like it, the fault and full force of judgment is upon the one who did the deed. The principle of "reaping what you sow" is hard to take, but as I stated earlier, the force of this proverb is warning those who have not yet fallen into these evil ways.

When I began this study of Proverbs I highlighted three things that our study together aimed to accomplish. These were taken from the first few verses of the book of Proverbs. The goals were to 1) know wisdom and knowledge, 2) receive instruction in wise behavior, and 3) give prudence to the naïve. I emphasized early on that one could learn "the easy way" or "the hard way." One person may learn from their mistakes, another may learn from the mistakes of others, but **a truly wise person hears righteous instruction and learns to avoid mistakes because of the value placed upon that instruction.** This is the perspective I hope to continue to present in these lessons; the perspective of putting a high value on God's wise instructions and learning from them before we make mistakes. Oh that we could increase in our skills of Godly living!

This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Josh 1:8 {The word here for success is תְּשֻׁבִיל it is the hifil of שָׁכַל – cause to be wise or learned}