

Proverbs Week #73 (8:4-6)

To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind. You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding. Listen, for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right.
Prov 8:4-6

In the first few verses of this chapter of Proverbs Wisdom cries out. She speaks to men and all of mankind. She further defines her audience by calling them simple and foolish. Now before you think “Hey I’m neither one of those! She must not be talking to me,” stop and consider her words. She is communicating with a purpose and wants those who are listening to increase in understanding and prudence. What exactly does that mean – to increase in prudence and understanding? What skills might we compare with these to help us understand the meaning of each?

Prudence

The Hebrew word translated prudence in this verse is *עֲרֻמָּה* and has a basic meaning of cleverness, cunning, trickery, or craftiness. It can be understood as either a good or a bad trait and needs context to determine which state is being displayed. The imperative in this phrase directs the student to cause prudence to be understood. Whatever this skill is that Wisdom commands us to gain it is not going to be gained through passive learning. As James directs, “*not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer*” (James 1:25), so too the student here is called to “listen” and this should be understood as an act of obedience. Because Wisdom is teaching words that are upright we know that the cleverness or craftiness is virtuous and is in accord with what is pleasing in God’s sight.

Understanding

The actual phrase that the translation above translates as “gain understanding” is *הִבִּינוּ לִבְ* and it too is an imperative. It directs the student to cause their heart to understand. We might say, “Take this to heart!” or “No! I’m serious! You really need to think about what I’m saying!” The heart here is that place where one reasons and calculates. You know all of us have one. We all have a heart. At any given moment we may have multiple things on our minds and may be making decisions on a variety of different levels. The characteristic of the fool is one who is slow of heart and doesn’t consider the things that Wisdom has to say as important. They do not think anything She has to say is worth hearing or remembering. To these naïve and foolish ones, Wisdom cries out to command them to have hearts that are willing to learn and remember what She has to teach. God wants us to understand His ways. Wisdom teaches us to always depend on God and to trust Him to guide us (Prov 3:5,6).

We are also given in these verses motivation for listening to Wisdom. She tells us that what She has to say is worthy to be heard and is upright. Compare these words to what David wrote in Psalm 33. In this song David is giving God’s people a reason to sing. He says, “*For the word of the LORD is upright, and all His work is done in faithfulness.*” (Psa 33:4) **The character of God backs the words of God.** Just as God is faithful in all that He does, so too Wisdom can be trusted in all that She says. When we are skilled in the use of God’s wisdom and are doing and teaching it according to what is pleasing to Him, then we can expect God to support the works of our hands. Do we really believe that? Even when things are hard?

What will it take for these words from the book of Proverbs to take root and bear fruit in our families? I believe we must diligently seek the Lord in prayer. We as families must not lean on our own understanding. How we experience the daily events of our lives or how we feel at any given moment must not be the main source from where we draw our strength. Our hope must be in God and He must also be the strength of our lives. May we view wisdom as one of our best friends and not neglect that relationship.