

Monday, June 10, 2019—Ecclesiastes 1-3

John Stonestreet, who leads the Colson Center for Christian Worldview, says the gods of the present age are sex, science, state, and stuff. From one or multiple of these, people tend to gain their identity, security, and purpose in life. A review of history would show that generation after generation has mistakenly worshiped these as well.

Solomon had all of these available to him. He was the state, he had more than 1,000 sexual partners, he had more stuff than anyone on earth, and he had the best of science and technology at his disposal. Toward the end of his life, he reviewed what these had provided, and he concluded everything was meaningless (1:2). Life was one big circle, and history merely repeated itself (1:9). His quest for wisdom was like chasing the wind (1:17).

He had tried everything to find purpose and fulfillment—pleasure, possessions, wisdom, women, entertainment, hard work, and more (2:1-11). Everything seemed to fall short. “So now I hate life because everything done here under the sun is so irrational. Everything is meaningless . . .” (2:17). He was left with a feeling of despair. He hoped that trying to find pleasure in food, drink, and work would provide some level of satisfaction, but in the end there was none.

The circular nature of life, Solomon concluded, meant there was a time for everything (3:1-8). God gives these things so people can realize He has put eternity in their hearts (3:11). They long for Him, but if they fail to recognize Him and His ways, they will be dissatisfied.

Praise God for His truth and ways. Pray to find satisfaction in Him.

Sunday, June 9, 2019—Proverbs 29-31

God gave the Law to show His people the boundaries of holiness. Their human nature was weak, and temptation would lead them beyond His design for their lives. To reject the Law was to sentence oneself to imperfection, mediocrity, and death.

Solomon understood the tendencies and flaws of humanity, and his proverbs continually point to the need for self-examination, repentance, and self-discipline for improvement and flourishing. “Whoever stubbornly refuses to accept criticism will suddenly be broken beyond repair” (29:1). Criticism, then, is hard but helpful, benefitting critic and critiqued (29:15).

Self-discipline can lead one to pray a most unusual prayer. “Lord, give me neither poverty nor riches.” Riches can lead one to trust in money and forget who God is, and poverty can lead one to desperate acts to provide for basic needs (30:7-9). Wisdom leads to a life of influence, despite being small or seemingly insignificant (30:24-28).

Wisdom tells the powerful not to seek out wine or women (31:1-7). The lure of money, sex, and power is never satisfied, so one is wise to turn his attention to the poor and needy to help them find justice (31:8-9). This leads to a life of true significance and satisfaction.

One of the most powerful positions on earth is the one of wife and mother. She influences her household and her community. A godly woman is able to make eternal impact. “Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last, but a woman who fears the Lord

will be greatly praised" (31:30).

Praise God for wisdom that leads to influence and worship.

Saturday, June 8, 2019—Proverbs 25-28

Wisdom is a gift from God, and, as with any gift, the desire of the giver is that the recipient use and enjoy the gift. "It is God's privilege to conceal things and the king's privilege to discover them" (25:2). No one can fully know God or understand all His ways, yet He makes knowing Him possible and knowing Him better the joy of each day's journey.

Knowing Him allows a person to know himself better. God makes His followers into valuable members of family, church, and community with humility, servant-mindedness, and self-control. "A person without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls" (29:25).

Without these characteristics, a person hurtles toward foolishness and deserves no honor at all (26:1). The fool becomes a liability to himself and to all those around him. His laziness and evil will cost him dearly.

Knowing God and knowing self are gifts of wisdom. A third gift is a good friend who seeks righteousness. "An open rebuke is better than hidden love! Wounds from a friend are better than many kisses from an enemy" (27:5-6). God uses the godly to sharpen one another (27:17).

Individuals, families, friends, and churches seeking God and His wisdom become bold witnesses and build the foundation for a stable nation (28:1-2). When the godly succeed, everyone benefits, but when the wicked are in charge, people go into hiding (28:12, 28).

Praise God for the gift of wisdom and the fruit of relationship with Him, personal character, and godly community.

Friday, June 7, 2019—Proverbs 22-24

Solomon saw the truth of life and recorded hundreds of pithy statements summarizing the ideas that led to prosperity and downfall. Everyone reading his proverbs could take a line and find exceptions to its statement, yet the underlying truth remains foundational. God has established right and wrong. He defines wisdom and folly, and His people flourish in this life and the next when they choose His ways. "The Lord preserves knowledge, but he ruins the plans of the deceitful" (22:12).

Solomon had all the riches anyone could want, but he gave a warning. "Don't weary yourself trying to get rich. Why waste your time? For riches can disappear as though they had the wings of a bird" (23:4). Solomon said parents should give attention instead to the discipline of their children. "Don't fail to correct your children. They won't die if you spank them" (23:13). He warned, as well, of the dangers of alcohol (23:29-35). Character, not cash, is the valuable commodity of life.

To prosper in life, each person has to think beyond himself. "Develop your business first before building your house" (24:27). He is not saying to give more attention to outward appearances. Solomon knew the danger that lay in growing comfortable. To develop a business contributes to the flourishing of others and motivates the individual to continue striving for personal growth and improvement.

Ask God to grow you in wisdom and character. Pray for a desire to help others know Jesus and grow in him so you will grow as well.

Thursday, June 6, 2019—Proverbs 19-21

From the beginning in the Garden, human nature has pointed to others to take the blame. “People ruin their lives by their own foolishness and then are angry at the Lord” (19:3). They want someone else to be responsible because they can’t bear the thought of being wrong and shouldering the consequences. Someone else should pay the price and fix it.

The solution is to keep the commandments (19:16) and to discipline children so they know the truth (19:18). Otherwise, life falls into ruins. When people are willing to sacrifice self and help others, they are becoming like God Himself, and He will repay that effort (19:17).

God is holy—unlike any other being. God is pure—without fault. He wants His people to become like He is through walking with Him and obeying Him. He despises disorder and chaos. He will not put up with people living by double standards (20:10) and gives eyes to see and ears to hear as gifts to all (20:12) so they might become who He made them to be.

He is more pleased with just and right actions in the world than with sacrifices at the Temple or going through the motions at church (21:3). His desire is to shape souls so they walk in step with Him, joyfully obeying and worshiping Him. They will find life, godliness, and honor (21:21).

Praise God for the sacrifice of Jesus, who took the penalty of others, and the gift of the Spirit, who gives life, strength, and wisdom.

Wednesday, June 5, 2019—Proverbs 15-18

“The Lord hates the sacrifice of the wicked, but he delights in the prayers of the upright” (15:8). God knows the heart. The world sees the outward actions, and some people may “look the part” of a faithful believer because they attend church regularly and give when the plate is passed. Their hearts, however, may well be far from Him. God loves the simple prayer prayed in deep faith far more than a massive offering from an empty heart. Service in a soup kitchen with no love for Him doesn’t impress Him.

God is above all things, and in Him all things hold together. In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps (16:9). Honor and success will only come if the plans are aligned with Him (16:3). Pride will only lead to destruction (16:18, 18:12), so be humble before God.

Solomon had more success and possessions than anyone else, but he knew self-control was better than conquering a city (16:32) and that a meager meal in peace was far better than a great feast during strife (17:1). Life is a matter of perspective and lived best through God’s eyes. Family and friends are a great treasure, but they can become a burden. Relying on the Lord can keep the heart cheerful (17:22) when dealing with the challenges that come with family, friends, work, and more.

Words of wisdom are like a life-giving stream (18:4) and a satisfying meal (18:20). Pray for a life of wisdom, pleasing to God and blessing others.

Tuesday, June 4, 2019—Proverbs 12-14

Leadership experts repeatedly emphasize that leaders are readers. If one wants to rise above others and lead, one has to live differently. To make the time for reading and self-improvement is non-negotiable.

Solomon knew the power of self-discipline. “To learn, you must love discipline; it is stupid to hate correction” (12:1). Discipline comes from personal efforts, but outsiders—parents, teachers, coaches, bosses, and the like—will offer criticism as well which can correct and improve. The wise accept this discipline, but to refuse is disrespectful and mocking (13:1).

Hard work and heeding correction pay off. Godly people bring life (12:28) through their words and their example. Their wisdom helps others begin to walk in the same wisdom (13: 20). Otherwise, laziness leads to slavery (12:24), the lack of wisdom leads to foolish choices and habits, and godlessness leads to death. To discipline someone is to love them (13:24).

In giving advice, leaders may sometimes say, “Follow your heart.” This is often the worst advice to give. “There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death” (14:12). Jeremiah knew the heart was deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). The right path is revealed from seeking God and listening to wise advisers, carefully considering all options (14:15). The leaders of those who gain wisdom rejoice at their wisdom (14:35).

“Fear of the Lord is a life-giving fountain; it offers escape from the snares of death” (14:27). Pray for personal discipline to spend time with God each day and for humility to listen to wise correction.