

"Hear the Instruction of a Father"
(Proverbs 4:1-9)

Introduction: If there is any one outstanding characteristic of the book of Proverbs it is the many times that Solomon tenderly pleads with his dear sons to pay close attention to his instruction, that it might be well with them, and that they might truly prosper in life. Because of their youth, and the tenderness of their hearts, he sought to carefully mold and shape their character while they were still pliable. He wanted to impress the importance of a godly life into their conscience, so that they might avoid the paths of the wicked. And so he again and again admonished them to listen carefully to his instruction, for he was seeking their eternal welfare. Charles Bridges writes, "Surely these frequent repetitions are as the angel's visit to the prophet -- 'waking him, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.' (Zech. iv.1.) A mind like Solomon's, 'large even as the sand that is on the seashore' (1 Kings, iv.29), might readily have made every sentence a fresh discovery of his knowledge. But more suitable to our sluggish and forgetful heart is 'the word of the Lord, precept upon precept.' (Isa. xxviii.13.)" (Proverbs 43). We all need this repetition in order to learn. This is true of you who are adults, and if of adults, how much more of children, and especially, how much more of you children who live in a world where there is ^{such} a famine of spiritual knowledge, but a feast of worldly things to draw your minds away from Christ. You need again to receive the Lord's instruction from one who is a spiritual father. And so pay close attention to what Solomon is admonishing you to do this morning, in order that you might receive God's blessing in life. What he says is,

listen
You must (pay close attention) to the Word of God and let His Law sink deep into your hearts, if you are to find true blessing in life.
*and do it with all your heart **

D First, to You Who Are Young, Listen to the Advise Which Solomon Gave to His Children and Learn His Lessons.

A. First, He Tells You that You Must Listen Carefully to His Words.

"HEAR, O SONS, THE INSTRUCTION OF A FATHER, AND GIVE ATTENTION THAT YOU MAY GAIN UNDERSTANDING" (v. 1).

1. There are many who can hear what is being said, but few that will really listen.

a. If you are not deaf, then you can hear. But the fact that you can hear does not mean that you will necessarily listen.

b. Hearing is what the ear does automatically. That is the way that God made it. When sound waves hit your ear drums, they are able to change that sound to electrical impulses. Those impulses are interpreted by the brain and communicated to your mind. It happens automatically. There is nothing that you have to do to make it work.

c. Listening, on the other hand, is something which you must do. To listen you must pay attention to what is being said until you understand it.

2. And that which is going to make the difference between your hearing or listening is whether or not you are interested in what is being said.

a. If it is something that is important to you, then you will listen carefully. But if you do not think that it is important, you won't listen.

b. If you were standing on a bridge which was on fire, and there was someone who was on the other side trying to give you directions on how you might be able to save yourself, you would certainly pay close attention to what he was saying.

- c. But if you were sitting in a class room where the teacher was teaching something that you had no interest in, you would find it very hard to listen.
 - d. The point is, that you will listen carefully if what is being said is important to you.
- B. And So Secondly Solomon Gives You Some Good Reasons Why You Should Listen to His Instruction.
1. First, he says, "FOR I GIVE YOU SOUND TEACHING" (v. 2a).
 - a. Literally Solomon says that he is giving to you "good" teaching.
 - b. That good teaching is the Law of God, and how to apply it to your life.
 - c. But it is more than the Law, it is also the Gospel. That is what lady Wisdom embodies: the way of blessing through Christ.
 - d. The Law threatens you; it shows you that you have sinned and that the wages of your sin is everlasting death.
 - e. But the Gospel shows you the way of escape. It shows you the One who came to take away sin, and in whom there is no sin. It reveals to you that God has provided a way of escape in His Son, if you will take hold of Him and turn from your sins.
 - f. Now to some of you, this might not seem too interesting. After all you might say, "I'm young, why do I need to deal with these things now? I still have plenty of time." But do you really?
 - (i) Outside of Christ, you are standing on that bridge which is burning. And underneath that bridge is not a fall that will end only in death, but a fall which goes into the fiery hell from which you will never escape.
 - (ii) Your parents and your elders are the ones standing on the other side calling to you, telling you what you must do in order to escape. But I fear that many of you are not listening. You don't really see your danger, and so you turn a deaf ear to it.
 - (iii) All we can do is tell you what God's Word says. But if it is to be of any help to you, you must listen to it and do it.
 - (iv) The Word does not work like a good luck charm. Simply having it, reading it, or hearing it won't do you any good. You must also do what it says.
 - (v) You must listen to its reproofs; you must tremble at its threatenings; you must obey its commands; you must embrace its promises.
 - (vi) The one who stands on the bridge is not helped by those seeking his rescue, unless he listens and responds accordingly. And so must you if you are to find the path of life.
 2. Next, Solomon uses his own experience to give ^{you} (his children) even further motives to seek lady wisdom. His father David, had taught him the same things that he is now trying to teach ^{you} (his children) (vv. 3-9).
 - a. Notice that his father did the most important thing that he could have done: He took the time to teach his son, "WHEN I WAS A SON TO MY FATHER, TENDER AND THE ONLY SON IN THE SIGHT OF MY MOTHER, THEN HE TAUGHT ME" (vv. 3-4a).
 - b. He realized then, what the apostle Paul also teaches us in Ephesians 6:4, that it is primarily the father's duty to

make sure that his children are instructed in the ways of the Lord. Paul writes, "AND, FATHERS, DO NOT PROVOKE YOUR CHILDREN TO ANGER; BUT BRING THEM UP IN THE DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCTION OF THE LORD."

- c. David realized that the years of his children's youth was the best time to impress them with the truths of another world. Children are much more impressionable. They have not yet formed their values for life. They have not yet become hardened through prolonged sin. They are like soft clay which can be molded and shaped, before it hardens with age.
- d. Solomon realized this as well, and so he writes, "TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO, EVEN WHEN HE IS OLD HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT" (Prov. 22:6).
- e. This is an admonition to you who are parents, that you should spend that very precious time which is needed to mold your children while they are still soft.
- f. Why is it, after all, that the Lord has placed them under your authority and in your households if it is ^{not} for this?
 - (i) You are their mentors; you are their role models; you are their teachers; your children are your disciples; they are in the process of becoming like you.
 - (ii) Anyone is bound to become like those they spend most of their time with. They spend most of their time with you, and they are going to become like you. Jesus said, "EVERYONE, AFTER HE HAS BEEN FULLY TRAINED, WILL BE LIKE HIS TEACHER" (Luke 6:40).
 - (iii) What a scary thought! Your children are going to be like you. My children are going to be like me.
 - (iv) What do you want your children to be like in their love and commitment to the Lord? Would you be satisfied if their's were like your's?
If your's is not what you want their's to be, you will not be able to engender it in them either. The cause cannot be greater than the effect. You cannot produce something greater than what is found in you. When you chose your own role models, do you look for those who are weaker than you or stronger? When you look for someone to teach you about something, do you pick those who know less, or more than you? You pick the stronger and more knowledgeable, of course.
 - (v) Outside of the Lord's express command to love Him with all of your being, I can't think of a better reason than your children's welfare for you to seek that the Lord would kindle His love afresh in your hearts. Outside of the Lord's command to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I can't think of a better reason for you to seek the knowledge of His will and obedience to it than for the sake of your children. If you will not do it for your own sake, maybe you will for the sake of your children.
 - (vi) Many parents have suddenly become more religious out of love for their newborn children.
 - (vii) You should want your children to have the very best possible start in life. Pray that the Lord will build you up in holiness so that you might have a good effect on their lives for Christ!

3. Well, Solomon not only tells us THAT his father taught him, he also tells us WHAT he taught him (vv. 4b-9).
- a. First, David told him, "KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS" (v. 4c).
- (i) Solomon was to guard his father's commandments in his heart. He was to keep them conscientiously.
 - (ii) He was to do so because his father had a God given office of authority over him.
 - (iii) The unchanging requirements of God's Law states, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER" (Ex. 20:12).
 - (iv) David knew that the blessing of God attended that commandment, and that if his son obeyed him, it would go well with him and he would live long on the earth (Eph. 6:3).
 - (v) Children, you need to listen to the commandments of your parents, and do what they say, so that the Lord might grant you a long life. But if you dishonor them by not obeying them, then you may be cut off in the middle of your years and come to an untimely end.
 - (vi) And parents, you need to insure that your children obey you for their good and your's. Their's because if they do not obey you, they will not receive the Lord's blessing. Your's because the Lord commands you to discipline if they disobey. "HE WHO SPARES HIS ROD HATES HIS SON, BUT HE WHO LOVES HIM DISCIPLINES HIM DILIGENTLY" (Prov. 13:24). "DO NOT HOLD BACK DISCIPLINE FROM THE CHILD, ALTHOUGH YOU BEAT HIM WITH THE ROD, HE WILL NOT DIE. YOU SHALL BEAT HIM WITH THE ROD, AND DELIVER HIS SOUL FROM SHEOL" (23:13-14).
 - (vii) If your child moves out of the place of God's blessing through his disobedience, it is your responsibility to bring him back through discipline. And if he or she doesn't like that, then you need to continue to apply it until they cheerfully submit to you.
 - (viii) I would like to be able to tell you that if you are diligent enough in your discipline that the salvation of your children's souls is guaranteed, but I don't believe that the Scripture tells us that.
 - (ix) However, if you do not discipline them, you are almost certain to guarantee their damnation.
- b. Secondly, David taught him that he should, "ACQUIRE WISDOM! ACQUIRE UNDERSTANDING! . . . THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM IS: ACQUIRE WISDOM; AND WITH ALL YOUR ACQUIRING, GET UNDERSTANDING" (vv. 5a, 7).
- (i) This is the whole thrust of what Solomon has been saying in the book of Proverbs. You must store up sound wisdom and understanding. You must learn, and then you must gain the skill you need to apply that learning to the situations of life.
 - (ii) It is one thing to know that it is wrong to be at odds with one of your brethren or friends. It is another thing to be able to take that knowledge and actually resolve the conflict. You need to be taught, you need to understand what you are taught, and you need to be able to apply what you are taught.
 - (iii) The more you grow in life, the more useful you will see that this wisdom is. And the more useful you see it to be, the more you will seek after it.

- (iv) And when in God's mercy you do, seek it from those who know more than you, and not less, and learn from them.
 - (v) And, parents, you should strive to be the number one source that your children can come to for wisdom.
- c. But once you have learned and acquired wisdom, you need also David's further admonition, "DO NOT FORGET" (vv. 5b).
- (i) It won't do you any good if you begin to learn something only to forget it.
 - (ii) It is only those things which become a part of your life that in the end will benefit you.
 - (iii) What is the sense of memorizing the catechism, if it is only forgotten in the next minute, or day, or year. You must store that knowledge up for good, and continue to keep it fresh by constantly calling it to mind.
- d. But if it is bad to forget it, it is even worse to purposely abandon it, "DO NOT ABANDON MY INSTRUCTION. . . . DO NOT TURN AWAY FROM THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH. DO NOT FORSAKE HER" (vv. 2b, 5d, 6a).
- (i) There is only one reason for turning from the truth, and that is that the truth hurts; it is unwelcome because it shines a painful light on a wicked heart.
 - (ii) To turn away from what is right to walk in darkness is a sure indication that you are still in a state of spiritual death. John said, "IF WE SAY THAT WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM AND YET WALK IN THE DARKNESS, WE LIE AND DO NOT PRACTICE THE TRUTH" (1 John 1:6).
 - (iii) To forsake the path of righteousness, to turn away from doing the right thing because it doesn't suit you is wickedness. You must not allow yourself to be tempted to abandon God's truth even for a moment, but must persevere in the light until you arrive at the gate of God's heavenly kingdom.
- e. And so you must, as David directed Solomon, "LET YOUR HEART HOLD FAST MY WORDS. . . LOVE HER. . . . PRIZE HER. . . . EMBRACE HER" (vv. 4b, 6c, 8a, d).
- (i) As long as you love righteousness and hold the truth of God fast, as long as you walk in the paths of righteousness, you can have a good assurance of your right standing with God.
 - (ii) It is only by the Holy Spirit dwelling in you that you can have a love for holiness at all. And if that love is there, it will cause you to hold on to the truth tightly, and to persevere in it with all your heart.
- f. And if you do, David says that there is a reward, "KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS AND LIVE. . . . SHE WILL GUARD YOU. . . . SHE WILL WATCH OVER YOU. . . . SHE WILL EXALT YOU. . . . SHE WILL HONOR YOU. . . . SHE WILL PLACE ON YOUR HEAD A GARLAND OF GRACE; SHE WILL PRESENT YOU WITH A CROWN OF BEAUTY" (vv. 4d, 6b, d, 8b, c, 9).
- (i) There is the promise of a long life in this world, and eternal life in the age to come.
 - (ii) There is the promise of security and protection as the Lord will not allow anything in the lives of His saints which He will not work together for their good (Rom. 8:28).

- (iii) *And there is the promise of honor and exaltation. It may not be in the eyes of the world, but it will be in the eyes of the One whose approval is far better than the world's.*
- (iv) *Chose for yourself. Would you rather have the garland of grace, the crown of beauty which wisdom gives? Or the fiery crown of God's indignation and wrath which He heaps on those who dishonor Him?*
- (v) *I pray that you will see the beauty of God's wisdom and reach out to take hold of her. I pray that you will not follow your own path, but the Lord's. I pray that, even at a young age, each of you children will embrace the Savior and find your delight in Him. He is a tree of life to all who take hold of Him, and happy are all those who hold Him fast (Prov. 3:18). Amen.*