

"The Wise Will Inherit Honor"
(Proverbs 3:35)

Introduction: This morning we will be looking at a verse which could be a summary of the whole teaching of the Bible with regard to man and what will happen to him in the end. The focus of the Bible, of course, is on the Lord and on His glory. It tells us who God is and how He has ordained all things for His own glory. It tells us of the fall of man, and how God has provided for the redemption of the fallen sons of Adam in Christ. But it also tells us about man himself, how he is to live and glorify God in this life, and what his end will be if he does, or does not. Since the revelation of God was given to us so that we might know God, and in knowing Him to find life and blessing, it should be very important to us to learn what it is that pleases Him, and what blessings He has promised to encourage us to do that which is right.

Solomon here is finishing his contrasts between the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the foolish, as he speaks of them in chapter 3. He has ^{considered} considered how each of these appear in the sight of God, "THE CROOKED MAN IS ^{considered} AN ABOMINATION TO THE LORD; BUT HE IS INTIMATE WITH THE UPRIGHT." He has ^{considered} considered the effect of their lives, not only upon themselves, but also upon their households and their posterity, "THE CURSE OF THE LORD IS ON THE HOUSE OF THE WICKED, BUT HE BLESSES THE DWELLING OF THE RIGHTEOUS." And he has considered God's dealings with both, "THOUGH HE SCOFFS AT THE SCOFFERS, YET HE GIVES GRACE TO THE AFFLICTED." This morning, Solomon contemplates the end of both the wise and the foolish. And what he tells us is,

*The wise will inherit honor, but the fool will inherit dishonor,
both in this life and in the life to come.*

What I would like us to consider this morning are some of the major characteristics of the wise and the foolish, to see what we are to imitate and what we are to avoid, and what the outcome of their lives will be, both in this life and in the life to come.

I. *First, Let Us Take a Brief Look At Who the Wise Man Is.*

A. *What We Have Seen to This Point, and What Solomon Will Continue to Show Us Through Many Examples Is that The Wise Man Is One Who Fears the Lord, and Turns from All Evil.*

1. *Indeed, Solomon tells us that the very starting point of all of our knowledge and wisdom must be here, "THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE; FOOLS DESPISE WISDOM AND INSTRUCTION" (Prov. 1:7). "THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM; AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY ONE IS UNDERSTANDING" (9:10; cf. Ps. 111:10).*

- a. *This biblical principle needs to be emphasized over and over again.*
- b. *We live in an age where if anyone believes in God at all, most of what he believes is wrong.*
- c. *One of the most common errors is that God is not to be feared. As R. C. Sproul puts it, "Man is not so bad, and God is not so mad."*
- d. *God, if He is believed in at all, is held to be a gigantic loving grandfather who wants nothing but the best for all of His creatures. God is not to be feared. God is love. It is His job to love all men no matter how wicked they are.*
- e. *But that is a very wrong idea of God. God is loving, but His love is reserved for His elect. And even that love is not directed toward them as long as they are outside of Christ.*

God loves the elect only for the sake of Christ, and as they are considered in Christ.

- f. Outside of Christ, man is at war with God, and God is at war with man. God does give good gifts to His creatures, and all the blessings that they have in life do come from His hand. But that does not eliminate the fact that God is angry with them and is going to destroy them, unless they repent.
- g. And this is why God is to be feared. He is a great and terrible Judge who will render to every man what he has done, whether good or bad.
- h. And even though the Christian has passed from His just wrath into His loving family by faith in Christ, the threatenings of the Law still show him what his sins deserve, and but for the grace of God, what he would receive for them.

2. That is why the fear of the Lord is a teacher to teach us wisdom. "THE FEAR OF THE LORD," Solomon writes, "IS THE INSTRUCTION FOR WISDOM" (Prov. 15:33). What it teaches us to do is to hate evil and to turn away from it. "THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS TO HATE EVIL" (8:13). "FEAR THE LORD AND TURN AWAY FROM EVIL" (3:7). It lays before us the path which the wise man must walk.

- a. If you really fear the Lord, you will shun all evil and all appearances of evil.
- b. You will fear committing any sin, because if your soul becomes ensnared by it, it will destroy you, or rather God will, unless you repent.
- c. You will fear displeasing God, for sin is a violation of the sacred covenant by which God has bound Himself to you in love.
- d. But you will also fear Him because of His fatherly chastening which He is so faithful to bring upon His children when they stray from the straight path of righteousness.
- e. His chastening is not pleasurable, but it is faithful and works righteousness in those trained by it (Heb. 12:11).
- f. Therefore, Solomon writes, "A WISE MAN IS CAUTIOUS AND TURNS AWAY FROM EVIL" (14:16).

g. And parents, if you want to teach your children wisdom, you must start w/ the fear of the Lord.

B. Not Only Does the Wise Man Turn from Evil, He Also Pursues Righteousness and Justice.

1. Righteousness is simply doing what is right in the sight of God. It is the opposite of sin, ^{which is} doing that which is wrong.

- a. Solomon says, "FOR WISDOM WILL ENTER YOUR HEART, AND KNOWLEDGE WILL BE PLEASANT TO YOUR SOUL; DISCRETION WILL GUARD YOU, UNDERSTANDING WILL WATCH OVER YOU, TO DELIVER YOU FROM THE WAY OF EVIL . . . SO YOU WILL WALK IN THE WAY OF GOOD MEN, AND KEEP TO THE PATHS OF THE RIGHTEOUS" (2:10-12, 20).
- b. To be wise, it is not enough to turn from doing what is wrong. You must also do what is right.
- c. There is a big difference between the two. Righteousness is not simply the absence of sin. It is the real presence of true acts of what is good and right in the sight of God. A righteous man not only does not steal, he also gives to the poor. He not only does not take life, he also protects life.

2. But the wise man is also a just man.

- a. To be just means that you deal honestly and fairly with every man.
- b. It is giving to each man what is justly his. The apostle Paul writes, "RENDER TO ALL WHAT IS DUE THEM: TAX TO WHOM TAX IS DUE; CUSTOM TO WHOM CUSTOM; FEAR TO WHOM FEAR; HONOR TO WHOM HONOR" (Rom. 13:7).
- c. The just man does not unfairly accuse his brother for some evil which he has not done. He does not delight in crimes going unpunished. He delights in equity, in giving to a man his just due. And he delights as well, of course, in mercy, which is not giving a man the retribution he deserves.
- d. The Lord sums this up through Ezekiel the prophet, "'BEHOLD, ALL SOULS ARE MINE; THE SOUL OF THE FATHER AS WELL AS THE SOUL OF THE SON IS MINE. THE SOULS WHO SINS WILL DIE. BUT IF A MAN IS RIGHTEOUS, AND PRACTICES JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND DOES NOT LIFT UP HIS EYES TO THE IDOLS OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL, OR DEFILE HIS NEIGHBOR'S WIFE, OR APPROACH A WOMAN DURING HER MENSTRUAL PERIOD -- IF A MAN DOES NOT OPPRESS ANYONE, BUT RESTORES TO THE DEBTOR HIS PLEDGE, DOES NOT COMMIT ROBBERY, BUT GIVES HIS BREAD TO THE HUNGRY, AND COVERS THE NAKED WITH CLOTHING, IF HE DOES NOT LEND HIS MONEY ON INTEREST OR TAKE INCREASE, IF HE KEEPS HIS HAND FROM INIQUITY, AND EXECUTES TRUE JUSTICE BETWEEN MAN AND MAN, IF HE WALKS IN MY STATUTES AND MY ORDINANCES SO AS TO DEAL FAITHFULLY -- HE IS RIGHTEOUS AND WILL SURELY LIVE,' DECLARES THE LORD" (Ezek. 18:4-9).

II. Secondly, Let Us Consider Very Briefly the Characteristics of the Foolish Man.

- A. He Is Just the Opposite of the Wise Man, As the Words Wise and Foolish Suggest. He Does Not Fear the Lord, and Does Not Turn from Evil.
 1. "THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE; FOOLS DESPISE WISDOM AND INSTRUCTION" (Prov. 1:7).
 2. The foolish man refuses to listen to sound wisdom, especially that which is able to make him wise unto salvation.
 3. If he really feared the Lord, it would motivate him to pay careful attention to what He says. But, as the Apostle Paul writes, "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES" (Rom. 3:18).
- B. Since He Despises the Wisdom and Instruction of God, He Turns Instead to His Own Ways, the Ways of Evil.
 1. "IT IS AN ABOMINATION TO FOOLS TO DEPART FROM EVIL" (13:19).
 2. If you turn from God, there is only one direction that is left, that of evil. The fool, then, lives unrighteously and favors injustice rather than equity.
 3. You may not think that this is the case. You may think that there is some kind of neutral ground that a person may occupy. But there are only two sorts of people, the children of God and the children of the devil, those who are for Christ and those who are against Him, the wise and the foolish. The Bible doesn't recognize any other.

III. Lastly, Let Us Consider Their End, Both in This Life and in the Life to Come.

- A. Solomon says, "THE WISE INHERIT HONOR, BUT FOOLS DISPLAY DISHONOR."
 1. There are fruits to be borne from each of these lifestyles.
 - a. Both the wise and the foolish are sowing seeds. They are laying up in store for the future.

- b. And there is going to be a harvest both in this age and in the age to come.
 - c. The decisions they make, the words they speak, the actions they take all have consequences, whether good or bad.
2. "THE WISE INHERIT HONOR."
- a. Honor has to do with recognition, credit, applause for something.
 - b. It is similar to what we mean when we talk about giving glory to God. To give glory to God means to give Him the credit for His wonderful works, to ascribe to Him honor.
 - c. The wise will have honor in this life.
 - (i) Remember Solomon said, "HOW BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO FINDS WISDOM, AND THE MAN WHO GAINS UNDERSTANDING. FOR ITS PROFIT IS BETTER THAN THE PROFIT OF SILVER, AND ITS GAIN THAN FINE GOLD. SHE IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN JEWELS; AND NOTHING YOU DESIRE COMPARES WITH HER. LONG LIFE IS IN HER RIGHT HAND; IN HER LEFT HAND ARE RICHES AND HONOR. HER WAYS ARE PLEASANT WAYS, AND ALL HER PATHS ARE PEACE. SHE IS A TREE OF LIFE TO THOSE WHO TAKE HOLD OF HER, AND HAPPY ARE ALL WHO HOLD HER FAST" (3:13-18).
 - (ii) The wise inherit more wisdom which ^{is} a great honor in itself. But they also inherit a long and prosperous life, filled with peace and blessing. They will have a good name, and men will seek to walk with them, that they might learn wisdom from them (Prov. 13:20; 15:2, 7).
They will be honored by men & by God
 - d. But the greatest honor that they will inherit is in the life yet to come.
 - (i) What good are these earthly honors anyway, unless you can enjoy them forever, for this life is quickly over and these things are then forever out of your reach?
 - (ii) What really matters is the life to come, the honor that one will receive there.
 - (iii) This is the greatest honor that a man may possess, eternal life. And it is the wisdom of God which leads to it. It is the wise who inherit it.
 - (iv) "SHE IS A TREE OF LIFE TO THOSE WHO TAKE HOLD OF HER," not only in this life, but in the one to come, "AND HAPPY ARE ALL WHO HOLD HER FAST" (3:18).
 - (v) In heaven, those who are wise will have honor and glory bestowed on them equal to what they have laid up in store by Him against that day. And God knows how to repay the faithful works of the saints.
3. "BUT FOOLS," on the other hand, "DISPLAY DISHONOR." This is what they inherit.
- a. Dishonor has to do with shame and disgrace. It is discredit, rather than credit; it is being looked down on, rather than being thought highly of.
 - b. Fools inherit dishonor in this life.
 - (i) "A BABBLING FOOL WILL BE THROWN DOWN" (Prov. 10:8).
 - (ii) "HE WHO BEGETS A FOOL DOES SO TO HIS SORROW, AND THE FATHER OF A FOOL HAS NO JOY" (Prov. 17:21).
 - (iii) "LIKE SNOW IN SUMMER AND LIKE RAIN IN HARVEST, SO HONOR IS NOT FITTING FOR A FOOL" (26:1).
 - c. But in the life to come, they inherit the ultimate dishonor.

- (i) Because fools despise God's wisdom and instruction, and will not fear Him, they will in the end inherit great shame.
- (ii) They will call on the rocks and hills to cover them in the day of God's wrath, saying, "FALL ON US AND HIDE US FROM THE PRESENCE OF HIM WHO SITS ON THE THRONE, AND FROM THE WRATH OF THE LAMB; FOR THE GREAT DAY OF THEIR WRATH HAS COME; AND WHO IS ABLE TO STAND? (Rev. 6:16-17).
- (iii) They will faint with fear when they hear the terrible words of the Lord directed to them, "I NEVER KNEW YOU; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS" (Matt. 7:23), "DEPART FROM ME, ACCURSED ONES, INTO THE ETERNAL FIRE WHICH HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS" (Matt. 25:41).
- (iv) And they will bear the shame and disgrace of their torment in that fire forever and ever.
- (v) The Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, in the closing words of that book, "THEN THEY SHALL GO FORTH AND LOOK ON THE CORPSES OF THE MEN WHO HAVE TRANSGRESSED AGAINST ME. FOR THEIR WORM SHALL NOT DIE, AND THEIR FIRE SHALL NOT BE QUENCHED; AND THEY SHALL BE AN ABHORRENCE TO ALL MANKIND" (66:24).

B. All that Remains to Be Asked Is, "Which Path Have You Chosen for Yourself, and Which Destination?"

1. Have you chosen the way of the wise?

- a. Do you fear the Lord and turn away from all evil? Do you seek righteousness and justice in all of your ways?
- b. If you do, then you have surely embraced the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is wisdom, righteousness and justice incarnate. He is the tree of life to all who take hold of Him, and He produces the fruits of righteousness in those who love Him.
- c. If you have, then there is honor promised to you here. Honor in this life and in the life to come. You are the blessed ones who will inherit the kingdom of God.

2. Or have you chosen the way of the foolish?

- a. Do you not yet fear the Lord so as to turn from your sin and to do what is right and just in His sight?
- b. Then God warns you this morning of dishonor and disgrace now, and more of the same in the age to come.
- c. Life is not a game in which the one with the most toys wins in the end.
- d. It is a time when the eternal destiny of your soul will be decided by you. ~~Do~~ ^{Do not} reject God and His Christ in this life ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~to~~ ^{to} chose damnation for yourself for all eternity.
- e. If you occupy the place of the fool this morning, Solomon wrote these words for you, "DO NOT BE WISE IN YOUR OWN EYES; FEAR THE LORD AND TURN AWAY FROM EVIL. IT WILL BE HEALING TO YOUR BODY, AND REFRESHMENT TO YOUR BONES" (Prov. 3:7-8).
- f. Won't you throw yourself on His mercy this morning, ask Him to change your heart of stone and to give you a heart of flesh? Won't you embrace the Son of Life, in order that you ^{might} ~~may~~ have life?
- g. Come to Him, and let His blood cleanse your sins. Come to Him and receive life through His life.

3. Lastly, it is good for all of us to reflect on the fact that though the sins of the wicked do earn their just condemnation in hell, the works of the righteous do not earn their honor or their salvation.
 - a. The only reason there is honor promised to us here is for the sake of Christ alone.
 - b. It is His life that gives us life. It is His death that cleanses us from our sins.
 - c. Our best works only merit damnation. But His works merit life and blessing.
 - d. As we come to the table this morning to reflect on Christ's death, let us remember, that but for His grace, all of us would be on our way to hell without any hope. It was the love of God the Father, in sending His Son, and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, in giving Himself up for us, that have rescued us from our sin. Amen.