

BACK TO THE TWO PATHS

Thursday, January 29
Reading: Proverbs 16:16-33

Proverbs 16:25 *There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*

The remainder of Proverbs 16 returns us to the theme of the two paths that was so prevalent in the first nine chapters. Wisdom is once again described as more valuable than any earthly treasure (16:16). We then see the “highway of the righteous” (16:17-24) followed by the path of the wicked (16:27-30).

THE RIGHT WAY (16:17-24) – A highway was a road free of obstructions. Pride can trip us up and block our way from living the life God wants. Better to “avoid evil” and “guard [your] ways” (16:17-18). It is better to be humble and be oppressed than to share the “plunder” and judgment of the proud (16:19). As James clearly tells us, the testing of our faith helps us grow in the Lord (James 1:2-4). Proverbs 16:20 parallels the one who heeds “instruction” in the first line to “the one who trusts in the Lord” in the second. “Gracious words” (16:21, 24) are sweet because they are God’s Words that bring healing and help to people. To be “prudent” (16:22-23) means understanding and good sense. It is taking the truths of Scripture and applying them to your life.

THE CROSSROAD (16:25-26) – Verse 25 is a repetition of Proverbs 4:12. It is placed here to transition us between the two paths. We look back at instruction in the right way and look forward to those who lead people in the wrong direction – a direction that ends in death. Each of us must decide which path we are going to take. Verse 26 reminds us that you can tell what a person is ‘hungry’ for by what they do. If we have an appetite for righteousness we will follow God’s path. If our appetite is for self and worldly pleasures we will follow the path to destruction.

THE WRONG WAY (16:26-30) – Notice the words used to describe the person who follows this path – scoundrel, perverse, violent, evil. “Scoundrel” literally means worthless, good for nothing, lawless. Proverbs again focuses on the damage their words cause. They stir up conflict, spread gossip, and destroy like “a scorching fire.” Their evil is not always out in the open. To’ wink with their eye” and “purse their lips” picture the subtle forms of communication they use to keep their plots secret.

The final three verses (16:31-33) turn us back once again to “the way of righteousness.” Those who travel it will be blessed with long life (gray hair). But doing so will require strength and patience to face the challenges of life with faith. The final challenge is to look up to the sovereign Lord we are called to fear and trust.

For centuries people have searched in vain for the fountain of youth that would give eternal life to those who drink from it. But God’s wisdom promises “a fountain of life” to those who follow it (16:22).

“But God’s wisdom gives us discretion that proves to be a life-giving fountain that can make us happy, healthy, and alive forever. How? When we live by God’s Word, He washes away the deadly effects of sin...and the hope of eternal life with Him gives us a joyful perspective on our present life. The fountain of youth was only a dream, but the life-giving fountain is reality. The choice is yours. You can be enlightened by God’s wisdom, or you can be dragged down by the weight of your own foolishness.”¹

¹ Life Application Bible notes: Old Testament-Proverbs, p 1030