

Understanding Confidence – Proverbs 3:21-26

INTRODUCTION – Confidence is a precious trait. We all need confidence in one way or another to survive and function every day. A person without confidence is a person void of strength and motivation. He is fearful, and there is an element of uncertainty in everything he does. If a person is not confident in his computer knowledge and his job is to repair computers, the finished product will probably not work or will not work very well. If a person has no confidence as a surgeon and has to remove a cancerous growth in a patient's head, it is very likely that the patient will die. Confidence is needed in life, in the home, in the workplace, and in the church.

Since confidence is so crucial in everyone's life, the source of one's confidence is even more significant and important. If this source disappears or is destroyed, one's confidence is destroyed as well. If his confidence is in his wealth, and when the wealth is gone, then he might feel that life is not worth living. Some even commit suicide because of this loss. If the foundation of one's confidence is eternal, then no matter what happens in the outward circumstances of his life, he will be able to live with confidence. His life is anchored in something unaffected by the highs and lows of society or the disasters of this life.

Where can one find such an eternal foundation to place one's confidence? The Bible has the answer and shows us the way.

I. Foolish Confidence Exposed – First and foremost, eternal and temporal confidence cannot co-exist. If one has temporal confidence, then one does not have the eternal and vice versa. In order to obtain eternal confidence, the temporal must be cast away.

a. Blind to Evil - Proverbs 14:16, "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident." (antithetical parallelism) – Marks of a person whose confidence is in all things temporal.

- **A person who trusts in the temporal is blind to evil.** – He does not fear God and does not depart from evil. He holds on to evil and immerses himself in more of it.

In contrast, the heart and conduct of the wise man show that he fears God and will not want to do evil and sin against Him. He departs from evil, i.e., withdraws from and eschews it. He doesn't even go near evil. He has the discernment to know what is and is not evil, and he keeps evil away from him as far as possible.

- **He rageth** – The word "rage" has the root meaning of crossing over. When he is rebuked for doing evil, he holds up his fist in arrogance and defiance. He does not fear God and God's Law.
- **He is full of confidence** – The word "confidence" means "to hide for refuge". He refuses to stop sinning and turn to God. His self-confidence has blinded him to what is right, and he will continue to think that evil is right and sin is delicious and good for him.

He will remain in his sins, for he is filled with pride and will not stop sinning and repenting.

b. Man will Fail -- Proverbs 25:19, "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint." (emblematic parallelism) – The word "confidence" here means "hope or trust." It has the same root word as the "confidence" in Prov. 14:16. The literal translation of this verse goes something like this – "A broken tooth and a foot out of joint is refuge in a treacherous man in time of distress."

- **Who is an unfaithful man?** -- He is a treacherous man who seeks to do you harm. He pretends to be your friend and to offer help. But in reality, he wants to corner you and destroy you. When he says he will help, you will stop asking others for help. When you are in great distress, you expect help to come from him, but nothing comes. You are left alone in great despair and utter hopelessness.
- **In time of trouble** – The word "trouble" means "distress or tribulation or affliction." In times when help is most needed and fails to come, the greatest harm and destruction can be done. The person's emotional and mental torture is multiplied exponentially. How painful would that be?
- **A broken tooth** – This is not a toothache due to a cavity. This tooth is fractured and has become extremely sensitive due to the exposed dentine. The pain is magnified many times when the break extends all the way to the centre of the tooth. This affects the pulp. The dental pulp is the part of the centre of the tooth made up of living connective tissues and cells called odontoblasts. Inside the dental pulp are the blood vessels and nerves. The slightest touch of the pulp or even air sucked in from his mouth would cause an excruciating pain that would throb and be continuous. Dentists today call this "Cracked Tooth Syndrome."
- **A foot out of joint** – The phrase "out of joint" means "dislocation." It is rare to dislocate one's foot. The foot is made up of three parts, the forefoot, midfoot and hindfoot. The pain is excruciating to say the least. The injured is immobilised. Like the broken tooth, the pain is also debilitating and continuous.

II. False Confidence Destroyed – Proverbs 21:22, "A wise *man* scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof." (synthetic parallelism) – This is an illustration taken from the battlefield. No one fights a battle using brute strength alone and without proper thinking and wise stratagems. Before any army charges forward or ambushes the enemy, careful planning is done in the war room behind closed doors. Only fools would rush headlong into battle, not knowing where the enemy is or how strong it is.

- **A wise man scales the city of the mighty** – The wise man will scale, i.e. climb up, the city of the mighty. Cities in OT times were fortified with high walls providing them with all-around protection. If possible, they would be built on mountain tops, giving them

an all-around view of approaching enemies. These cities would be near impossible to conquer. Yet the Bible says that the wise man climbs up the city, implying that these manmade fortified cities are no match for wisdom. No matter how strong these cities are, there will always be a weakness. The wise man would find that weakness and devise a strategy to capture the city.

- **A wise man casts down the strength of confidence** – The mighty men would hurry inside these cities for refuge, believing that they would be safe and secure from the enemy without. However, the wise men outside the city will inevitably succeed in capturing and destroying the city. The strength of the confidence or refuge of those inside the cities would be cast down, i.e. destroyed. All manmade confidence belongs to this word "refuge." Taking refuge in money, people, even governments and the mightiest army in the world is of no long-term use. All powers will decline.

The strength of any mighty city lies in the people who live inside the city.

III. Strong Confidence Revealed – Proverbs 14:26, "In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge." (synthetic parallelism) – The confidence that is strong and able to withstand all the diverse assaults of life and the evil one lies in the fear of the LORD!

- **What is the fear of the LORD?** – The fear of the LORD means a reverential fear, which definitely includes the idea of being frightened. It is a respectful kind of fear whereby the believer does not want God to be angry or displeased with him. Only believers have this fear, for the fear of the LORD will always lead to salvation. After salvation, this fear of the LORD remains in the believer's life, preventing him from sinning. He needs this fear of the LORD to keep him from sinning. The fear of the LORD grows stronger when he grows in the grace and knowledge of the perfect Word of God.
- **What is strong confidence?** – The word "confidence" is the same as in 21:22 and 25:19. It means "to hurry for refuge." The emphasis here is to hurry because there is little time. The fear of the LORD will give strong and immediate refuge to the believer. He will not sin. When he sins against God, he repents immediately because he does not want the wrath of God to hang over his head. He will not be afraid of man. He will not succumb to seduction and temptations.
- **The LORD's children shall have a place of refuge** – The children of the LORD will surely find a place of refuge, i.e. a place where they can flee to for refuge. The emphasis is one of haste in the face of impending danger. This place of refuge will come immediately to the child of God who has the fear of the LORD in him.

IV. Right Confidence Protects – Proverbs 3:21-26, "My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: 22. So shall they be life unto thy soul, and

grace to thy neck. 23. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. 24. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. 25. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. 26. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken." – The word "them" in verse 21 refers to "wisdom, understanding and knowledge." These are all references to the Word of God, in which God is the Subject, as explained in verses 19 and 20. Wisdom means the application of knowledge. It is applying the right portion of God's Word to the right circumstances of life. There is no area of life that the Word of God does not cover. Understanding means "intelligence." It is the ability to grasp the situation at hand. Knowledge literally means "to know because one has seen." This means accurate and true knowledge.

- **Do not let go of God's Word** -- Verse 21 (synonymous parallelism) places human responsibility to the fore. If the believer does not obey the Word of God, it is not the Word of God that leaves the believer, but the believer who leaves the Word.

The word "keep" here is different from the "keep" in verse 26. Here, it means "to keep by hiding." If the believer does not hide God's Word in his heart, the Word of God will depart from his eyes. The Word of God is also called "sound wisdom, intellectual understanding, whereby the mind is filled with truth and discretion, sagaciousness or far-sightedness." When a believer lives a life in light of the prophetic truths of God's Word, he will always live well and right.

- **Life and grace to the believer** – Verse 22 (synonymous parallelism) The Word of God becomes indispensable to the life and very soul of the child of God. He will never exchange anything on this earth for the Word of God. The Word of God has become the very life that sustains his soul; without it, he dies. It is like "grace" hanging around his neck like a beautiful necklace that makes the believer's life beautiful.
- **The believer will live a Life of Safety (23-25)** – Verse 23 (synonymous parallelism) focuses on the outcome of the believer who hides God's Word in his heart. His life will be one of safety. This safety is both physical as well as spiritual when applied to the nation of Israel. Israel would walk in God's truth and be blessed with safety in the land from diseases, famine, drought, and human enemies. For the believer living in ecclesiastical times, it is above all else a spiritual safety rather than a physical one. The reason is that we worship God in spirit and in truth, whereas the nation of Israel, as God's witness on earth in OT times, worshipped God in spirit and in truth, and in a particular location. We will hold on to our faith in Christ unto death and find ourselves in heaven after death.

Verse 24 (synonymous parallelism) illustrates how safe and secure the child of God is! Sleep is like death because one is totally helpless while asleep. He is like a dead person, oblivious to everything around him. The child of God knows that nothing can ever happen to him without his heavenly Father's permission. His heavenly Father watches over him all his days, even when he is most helpless, in his sleep. The word "afraid" is the word for "dread."

Verse 25 (synthetic parallelism) – The word “fear” means “dread”, as in verse 24 (afraid). In other words, the believer will not be fearful of dread. He will not be fearful about his future not matter how “dark” his future might seem to be, even when such dread comes suddenly. He is not afraid of the sudden overwhelming destruction of the wicked one, even when it comes. He knows that nothing catches His heavenly Father by surprise. It might surprise him but not the heavenly Father!

- **Foundation of Confidence** – The LORD is the confidence of the believer. Here, the word “confidence” refers to the “flank” of the kidneys. **Leviticus 3:4 (KJV)**, And the two kidneys, and the fat that *is* on them, which *is* by the flanks, and the caul above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he take away. [**FLANK – CONFIDENCE; FAT – BEST; CAUL - EXCELLENCE**]. The self confidence of the believer must be given over to the LORD and be replaced with God confidence. Moses is a good example.

APPLICATION –

- **Foolish Confidence are the things on this earth;**
- **Wise Confidence is the LORD and His Holy Word;**
- **The Possession of Godly Confidence is to possess the fear of the LORD.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do many Singaporeans regard success in life as the best confidence to possess in life? Do you also regard success as your confidence?
2. What are some of the temporal confidences that man has trusted in and, at the end of their lives, have failed them? How does one obtain temporal confidence, and why is it so potent in its seductive snares?
3. Do you have the fear of the LORD in you? If you do, share how this has helped you as a student in school, a child at home and as an adult in your workplace; if you are married, in your relationship with your spouse.
4. Do you agree that all men are unfaithful? Do you agree that a Christian should not have confidence in his pastor or in his church for the stability of his faith? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Do you sleep well at night? Are you a fearful person who feels insecure? Do you need people to like you all the time in order to feel secure?