

Proverbs

Words of Wisdom

Lesson #8 for February 21, 2015

Scriptures: Proverbs 20-22; 1 Corinthians 12:14-26; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Matthew 25:35-40.

1. Philosophers have spent a great deal of time discussing the relative importance of heredity versus environment. Heredity sets certain boundaries in our lives such as our appearance, sex, skin color, stature, and genetic deficiencies. However, when talking about more intangible things such as wisdom, heredity is probably not the most important factor. To a great degree, we are a product of our environment. Our brains are filled with everything we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch throughout our lives.
2. What we see and hear in our modern world is enormously impacted by the Devil. One can hardly turn on a television or drive down a major road without being accosted by something that is very much opposed to basic Christianity.
3. Our only safety is in spending more time with Scripture and with the writings of Ellen White with the Holy Spirit as our Guide.
4. Read Proverbs 20. How many factors can you identify in this chapter that are common to all human beings? Proverbs 20:12 makes it clear that we are all created by God. This makes us all part of one great family and also makes every one of us a brother or sister to each other and a son or daughter of God. This is not to imply that we are all exactly equal. Clearly, we are not. In several passages the apostle Paul discussed how different parts of the body work together for a common goal. In the same way, people with different talents and different gifts need to work together for the common goals of Christianity. (See 1 Corinthians 12:14-31.) We each have different gifts. And the glue that holds all Christians together is *agape* love which Paul called the most important gift of all. (1 Corinthians 13)
5. A second factor that makes us all equal is that we are all sinners. Thus, we all need the salvation provided by Jesus Christ. (Proverbs 20:9) None of us has the capacity to earn our way to heaven. So, do we understand why Jesus had to die and what that should teach us about sin, evil, and the great controversy? That would make a tremendous difference!

If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. **And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.**—Ellen G. White, *MS 36, 1890, pp. 2, 3; Faith and Works*, p. 20.0; 1888, 812.2. [Bold type is added.]

6. Shouldn't this prevent us from feeling either superior or inferior to any other person? Of course, we have never been given the task of comparing ourselves to others! Unfortunately, that is an all too common human tendency. But, none of us can be saved without the cross; and none of us will be lost if we clearly understand, appreciate, and live according to the teachings of the cross.
7. Read Proverbs 20:6. Compare Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Revelation 14:13; 20:12-13; Jeremiah 9:23-24; and Mark 9:35. Ultimately, every one of us will be judged by our works. The same standards will be applied to us as will be applied to the people who drowned in the flood, the inhabitants who were burned up in Sodom and Gomorrah, and the people of Jesus's

hometown of Capernaum. (Matthew 11:21-24; Luke 10:13-14) This should make us humble and also prevent us from idolizing any other human being. The only thing of which we can honestly boast is what God has done for us. Look at the example of Ellen White.

8. There are some individuals who have great ups and downs in their spiritual experiences. At times, they may seem to be the most saintly people around. But then, there may be long periods when they do not seem to care much about God or religion. Esau was like that with respect to his birthright. By contrast, other people are consistently patient and loving and seek every day to follow God's will for their lives. They are more like Jacob. But, the truth is that it is more important and a greater challenge to live for God than to die for Him. Almost with reverence we look back to the experiences of the martyrs. And we are certainly not trying to belittle that experience. However, to live a consistent life like that of Enoch or even Elijah is what God is really hoping for. We praise God by doing what is right.
9. Read Proverbs 20:17; 21:5. There are those people who believe that the only way to get ahead in life is to be dishonest or even to steal. Those people will ultimately lose.
10. Read Proverbs 20:21. This verse seems to suggest that some children tried to gain premature access to their inheritance from their parents. This is certainly not consistent with the teaching of the fifth commandment. And in the end, such people will lose. Isn't that what the prodigal son did? (Luke 15:11-32)
11. Read Proverbs 20:22. Revenge is a terrible human tendency. But, it is so difficult for us to be patient long enough to let God work things out. The Bible is full of examples of people trying to run ahead of the Lord. Compare Proverbs 25:21-22, *NKJV*. This ancient Egyptian ritual expression is not to be taken literally. If we can learn to return love for hate, we might even save our enemies and overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21) Of course, that would require that we ultimately die to self.
12. Read Matthew 25:35-40 and Luke 10:26-37. It is interesting to suggest that compassion for the poor may be a better measure of one's true Christianity than piety or many other religious characteristics that people look up to.
13. Read Proverbs 19:17; 21:13. How sensitive are we to the needs of the poor? How much do we do to try to help them? God suggested that what we do for the poor is as good as if we had done it for Him personally.
14. But, we also need to do it for the sake of the poor themselves. Read Proverbs 22:2. God intended for all human beings to be equal. So, the poor need our help not only because they are poor but also because they are our brothers and sisters. More than that, it is of enormous benefit to our characters to set aside our selfishness and in true Christian love reach out to those who are less fortunate. What better way is there to learn to die to self and reflect how Christ behaved when He was here on this earth?
15. Read Proverbs 22:6. This verse in various translations has been read and claimed by many parents down through the generations. What is it really saying? The word in this verse for *educate* or *train* is the same word that was used for *dedication* of the temple in 1 Kings 8:63. So, how are we to dedicate our children to the Lord through their early childhood education so that they will remain faithful to the Lord for the rest of their lives?

To parents is committed the great work of educating and training their children for the future, immortal life.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 24, 1890 par. 1; *Child Guidance*, p. 38.2.

16. Remember that Paul himself may have had Proverbs 22:6 in the back of his mind when he

commended Timothy with the words: "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:15, NKJV)

17. Read Proverbs 22:8,15. Does it look to you like these verses are related? Education is essential; and sometimes, it requires discipline. But, the most important education our children get is from our personal examples. What kind of legacy are we leaving?

Parents should be models of truthfulness, for this is the daily lesson to be impressed upon the heart of the child. Undeviating principle should govern parents in all the affairs of life, especially in the education and training of their children. . . . Parents, never prevaricate; never tell an untruth in precept or in example. If you want your child to be truthful, be truthful yourself.—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 151.1-3; compare *The Health Reformer*, January 1, 1880 par. 7; *MS 126*, 1897. (Contrast the advice in *FE 68.3*.)

Many fathers and mothers seem to think that if they feed and clothe their little ones, and educate them according to the standard of the world, they have done their duty. They are too much occupied with business or pleasure to make the education of their children the study of their lives. They do not seek to train them so that they will employ their talents for the honor of their Redeemer. Solomon did not say, "Tell a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." But, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." [Proverbs 22:6]—Ellen G. White, *RH*, June 24, 1890 par. 1; *Child Guidance*, p. 38.2. [Content in brackets is added.]

18. Unfortunately, many parents have looked at this verse as if it was going to somehow rectify whatever problems they may have caused by their early education of their children. So, how do we give our children the best possible education? Do they understand the most important basic principles of Christianity and the truth about the great controversy? Do they see the loving, caring, obedient behavior of their parents?
19. So many of the emphases in our world today are on immediate gratification. Even the media focus on sound bites. Where are the wise instructors that lead nations to stand up for principle and look to the long-term results of their behavior? Why is it so hard to recognize the intangible rewards of wisdom? **How can we help emphasize to our children the importance of learning to do what is right because it is right rather than just because someone else is doing it or because of fear of punishment or hope for reward?**
20. If we are going to have successful Christian lives, it is essential to use wisdom and good judgment. All you have to do is look at the newspaper or watch the news to see the results of bad judgments or decisions made by others. But, just as automobiles and homes have very different values based on quality, excellence, safety, reliability, and even location, humans are also judged by similar standards.
21. Think of Paul and Silas singing in the Philippian jail. (Acts 16:19-25) What did they have at that point that made them able to sing? Wasn't it a relationship with their God?
22. So, what are we supposed to learn from these three chapters in Proverbs? Proverbs 20 focuses on making wise decisions in life. The drinking of wine is discouraged because it clouds our decision-making capacity. Discipline is extolled in verse 30 because it tends to make people think more clearly. Throughout this chapter, we are encouraged to think clearly, to know when to start and when to stop a given activity, and even to know when to say, "No."

We are to learn how to recognize good counsel and how to exercise common sense; and thus, as the Bible repeatedly emphasizes, we are to learn to be humble and aware of our own shortcomings and thankful for God's watchcare over us while He searches our motives and our thoughts. True, faithful Christians will have lives marked by transparency, patience, and firmness.

23. Proverbs 21 continues the lesson from the previous chapter but talks about habits that destroy judgment.

Proverbs 21 is a list of intellectual and emotional habits that, when indulged, cripple one's judgment. The list is rather long, but the underlying principle is clear: you lose judgment when you indulge in vices. The people who love vices are proud (vss. 4, 24), hasty (vs. 5), dishonest (vss. 6, 7, 28), crooked (vs. 8), contentious (vss. 9, 19), desirous of evil (vs. 10), scornful (vs. 11), wicked (vss. 15, 18, 27), without compassion (vs. 13), corrupt (vs. 14), distracted (vs. 16), given to pleasure (vs. 17), wasteful (vs. 20), overconfident (vs. 22), loquacious (vs. 23), lazy (vs. 25), stingy and greedy (vs. 26), hypocritical (vs. 27), coldhearted (vs. 29), and against God (vss. 30, 31).

The underlying principle is that you cannot have good judgment if you enjoy vices. This is why a leader must be a person of character who has a compassionate heart (vs. 21). The problem, of course, is that humans have a natural bent toward vices. (*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* p. 99.)

24. Why do people like to sin? Why does vice hold such a grip on some people? Why does vice seem to flourish in large cities?

25. Proverbs 22 discusses the rewards of wisdom.

The reward of wisdom is significant and multifaceted. For example, wisdom helps you to recognize danger and avoid it (vs. 3), to be humble (vs. 5), to know how to educate a child (vs. 6), to be generous (vs. 9), to have a pure heart, to know how and when to speak (vs. 11), and to enjoy God's protection (vs. 12). In stark contrast, folly brings only sorrow in its tow. By pursuing earthly riches, many find their lives filled with emptiness (vs. 8), contention (vs. 10), laziness (vs. 13), and lust (vs. 14), and discover that they have become oppressors (vss. 16, 22, 23). Solomon calls upon the reader to become wise by listening (vss. 17, 18), trusting God (vs. 19), seeking knowledge and truth (vss. 20, 21), and working hard (vs. 29). They are to avoid becoming like those who, as a result of hating wisdom, seek out the company of rich and powerful friends who have no judgment (vss. 22-28).

(*ibid.* p. 99-100.)

26. In light of all this, read Philippians 3:4-11. By any normal worldly standard, Paul was at the top of his game. He had an excellent education, he was a Roman citizen, and in every way he should have been considered a leader among men. But, he counted all that as nothing but dross in contrast with the value of getting to know and love Jesus Christ. What would happen if a group of Seventh-day Adventist Christians today were willing to commit themselves to spreading the gospel as Paul did in his day? Is that possible in our day?

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