

Abridged from a sermon preached recently

# Wisdom's Implorations

BY

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A fresh look at the book of Proverbs, highlighting  
the glory of the Person of Christ Jesus therein.

**T**HE BOOK OF PROVERBS is essentially a collection of Hebrew adages and maxims constructed by Solomon, the son of David and the successor of his throne in the kingdom of Israel. Solomon wielded an enormous influence upon his own nation for the good and this influence extended particularly to the neighbouring nations as well. He is fondly regarded as a king of understanding and discretion; because of his request after his coronation, Solomon was graciously bestowed with wisdom by God Himself. God Himself had condescended to grant to Solomon anything he would have asked and since Solomon did not ask for fame, honour or riches but for wisdom, God graciously conferred on him all the rest also. He who obtains wisdom would also receive honour and glory and riches because these issue from it. "As wise as Solomon" is a well known simile even among the heathenistic people. Solomon is universally regarded as the wisest man ever to live upon the face of the earth. Solomon sought to apply wisdom in all the affairs of his own life and in the government which he exercised upon his own people as well as in the diplomacies with foreign countries. The glory of Solomon's wisdom transcended his own life span. Yea, it even prevails in our own generation. Predominantly all western management concepts, economic paradigms, political philosophies, principles of industrial relationship and commercial procedures have their roots and links to Solomon's proverbs. Management gurus and political advisors are not ashamed to identify with and refer to Solomon's dictums in Proverbs. America's ivy league institutions have their foundations in Solomon's cluster of principles. The world over, whether in the chambers of politics, the sphere of education, the courts of justice, the arena of commerce or the constitutions of nations, the counsel and the directives of Proverbs are cited and deferred to. Many who are pioneers in the frontiers of divers fields of life are those who are requisitely instructed much in Solomon's wisdom. Like the queen of Sheba, they too are riveted to and captivated by these enduring principles of life. *"Counsel is Mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. By Me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By Me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me. Riches and honour are with Me; yea, durable*

riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and My revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures" (Proverbs 8:14~21). There are many around the world, in the annals of history, that can vouch the reality and experience of this truth.

While Solomon may be said to be successful in many of his endeavours, yet not everyone would affirm his life as exemplary of his own teachings. This irony candidly reminds us that harnessing the knowledge of wisdom may not necessarily issue in applying and practising it in our everyday affairs. There is a distinction between the procurement of knowledge and the experimenting of it in life. Solomon may be found lacking in the latter but that should in no way disqualify or dent the efficacy of the adages and dictums he propounded. It is to arrest such qualms concerning the veracity and spiritual utility of Solomon's works that the Holy Spirit stamps upon this collation the seal of divine inspiration. It now bears the authority of "*the Greater than Solomon*", even our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is also the son of David. Thereby the words of a man, even though he might have been a dismal failure in real life, become the words of eternal life. It is in the incarnation and the earthly life of obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ that we find the fullest and purest expression of the full scope of this wisdom. Our Lord is not just the epitome of this wisdom practicalised but He is the very fountain of it. The Apostle Paul, in his Colossians epistle, wrote concerning Christ: "*In Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (Colossians 2:3). Christ is the Author of wisdom and every now and then in this collection of proverbs we see Christ Jesus Himself attempting to convey this truth to us. There are tinges of heaviness and grief in Christ's voice and import because only a remnant perceive and experience this truth down the corridors of history. Thus the impoverishment of society, which characteristically wallows in the mire of conceit and folly.

The proverbs, by divine design, are deliberately arranged in an incoherent and disjointed manner, devoid of any sequence, connection and development of a particular theme. However they are comprehensive in scope. They aggregately furnish for every compartment of the spectrum of life. Just as

the Psalms can be said to be a complete manual of hymns for the church, Proverbs provides a sufficient canon of principles as a rule of life. In view of the fact that Proverbs is a mere compendium, its sufficiency in catering to make every man "*perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" is astonishing.

These principles are rudimentary and basic, being the foundational precepts of life. This is why the apprehension and mastery of each of these principles is so vital and essential. Every man, regardless of his age and experience, should humble himself to study them afresh. And study them again and again. It is a costly mistake to subscribe to the notion that Proverbs is especially meant for young people. It is wrong to assert that they fundamentally serve to nurture and train children. Proverbs is not only meant for children but for all men whosoever. The writer of Hebrews, seeing the possibility of such a misconception, addressed it when he wrote concerning Proverbs, "*And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as unto children*" (Hebrews 12:5a). The fact is that we should adopt the docility of children in comprehending this book. Solomon reminds us that the prudence of the wise is that, "*A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels*" (Proverbs 1:5). The amazing thing about Proverbs is not just its comprehensive scope, but the staggering depths of its riches. We have to delve into it to appreciate this. Those who sufficiently master it will experience that "*whatsoever he doeth shall prosper*" (Psalm 1:3b).

There is this old controversy concerning the approach to the study of Proverbs. Are these principles prescribed here meant to facilitate nurture or are they advocating the doctrine of regeneration and conversion? Must a man be converted before he can be operatively inculcated with these teachings? Are the proverbs efficacious to those who have yet to experience a breakthrough in the saving power of the everlasting Gospel?

My answer is that Proverbs is meant for all, both the unregenerate and those who have already been quickened by the saving grace of Christ Jesus. For the regenerate, the rules of this book help them in the process of sanctification, so that they may "*adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*" (Titus 2:10b).

As for the unconverted, every proverb speaks of his crying

need for Christ. For without the grace of God, a man cannot really and fully attain to any of these principles of wisdom. Without spiritual thirst, a man cannot procure a meek and teachable spirit. Without the Spirit of God, a man cannot maintain his quest and aspiration to be perfect so as to please God in everything. Without evangelical repentance, the true spirit of reformation can never be evoked, let alone sustained. *"But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it"* (Hebrews 4:2b). The writer of Hebrews was referring to those who witnessed the great miracles of God in Egypt and in the wilderness. Yet they did not receive saving grace. And hence, despite their numerous spiritual advantages, they failed to enter into eternal rest (Psalm 95:11; Hebrews 3:18,19). One of the primary objectives of Proverbs is to induce us to certify that we possess the spiritual capacity and facility to profit from its study.

This is why we observe that in the book of Proverbs, wisdom is often personified. The tender of wisdom seems more like an advert of a person rather than a promotion of a plethora of principles. *"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof"* (Proverbs 1:24,25). It is obvious the personification of wisdom is meant to intimate the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And Wisdom's implorations are nothing short of the earnest appeals and compassionate overtures of Christ. Without first receiving Christ, all our attempts to equip ourselves with the principles of life will be futile. We cannot randomly pick and choose the principles we desire at our own convenience. It is like a package deal. The entire range of the principles of wisdom only secure effective access into our hearts when we requisitely embrace Wisdom Himself. Without Christ, we would be bereft of the capacity to cherish and preserve these principles. As the prophet Jeremiah depicts it, we will be broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13).

Hence, we see that the Gospel is so wonderfully entrenched in this beautiful book. The book of Proverbs sets forth the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The principles of wisdom are couched in the overtones of the Gospel. Blessed are those who can hear the voice of Christ clearly in this book. *"Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates, wait-*

ing at the posts of My doors. For whoso findeth Me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD" (Proverbs 8:34~35). Thus every spiritual maxim or adage is an attempt to preach Christ to the reader. Each proverb reminds us of the deepest need of our soul. Every proverb preaches afresh the Gospel of the redeeming grace of God. Hence the value of Proverbs both to the saint and the seeking sinner.

Many who are pseudo theologians, mere academicians and wise in this world attempt to scoop profit and benefit from this book by piecemeal means. The book itself seals the fate of those who attempt to secure blessing by any dubious means. "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices" (Proverbs 1:31). It is conceit for men to think that they can be morally and intellectually sound without first seeking salvation in Christ Jesus. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him" (Proverbs 26:12). The fool is one who repudiates wisdom's overtures outrightly. The conceited man, on the other hand, presumes that he need not attend to Wisdom's callings because he reckons he has already attained to it. There is no greater delusion in Christendom than that which causes unregenerate men to assume that they are confirmed Christians.

It is preposterous that any should peruse the book of Proverbs without being strongly impressed with the Gospel overtones that enjoin repentance and faith. "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, how long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at My reproof: behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you, I will make known My words unto you" (Proverbs 1:20~23).

O, the awesome consequences of those who spurn Wisdom's plaintive and ubiquitous overtures! O, the folly and gullibility of those who continue in indifference to the Gospel nuances in each proverb of this blessed collation of the *son of David*! ❧



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