

The Calling of Young in the Church and Home

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

"Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not." Proverbs 8:32, 33

There is nothing more comforting or reassuring than to know that God is our sovereign Friend! God's covenant friendship in the line of generations is a truth we hold dear. In connection with this truth we often consider the obligations of covenant parents toward their children. God is a God of means who chooses to carry on His covenant from one generation of believers to the next by way of godly instruction and nurture of children in the home and family.

Often overlooked, however, is the covenant calling and obligation children and young people have in the sphere of the home and church as well. Parents are not the only ones with a serious responsibility in the church and covenant where God has placed them. Their children also God holds accountable. Solomon in the passage we quoted above gives the calling of youth within the sphere of the home and church: "hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not."

There is one matter to keep in mind when considering this passage in Proverbs: it is not Solomon speaking to us! He may have penned the words of this passage but someone else is addressing us here. In this entire chapter, it is the virtue of wisdom that is addressing us. Wisdom says to young people: "hearken unto me, O ye children, for blessed are they that keep my ways!" Obviously, Solomon personifies wisdom, that is, gives to this virtue human characteristics. Wisdom is made to sound like a person that is able to speak and instruct us.

Since it is this virtue of wisdom that addresses us as young people it is good to identify her. When we speak of a wise person then that person, first, is gifted with knowledge. Usually that knowledge is in a certain area of life, but sometimes a person is knowledgeable in many areas of life. A wise person is one who has stored away in his mind all kinds of facts invaluable to solving problems that may arise. But wisdom implies much more than mere intellect. Wisdom is of a very practical nature. It is the ability to put that knowledge of certain facts to use in a skillful way. One who has a head full of knowledge and is not able to put it to practical use is not wise—smart maybe, but not wise. It is this wisdom that tells us to hearken unto her. She tells us not only to know things, but to be able to put things into practical use in our lives.

The wisdom of our text requires, however, that we know even more about her. In this chapter wisdom identifies herself as a beautiful virtue, one with beauty of truth and righteousness. There is nothing wicked or perverse about the wisdom of this chapter. You see, according to James there are two kinds of wisdom: an earthly and carnal wisdom geared toward the sensual and even devilish things of this world. This is worldly wisdom that has a knowledge of carnal things and the ability to use that knowledge to fulfill these carnal and often sinful things. Then there is also that wisdom that is from above, from heaven. James tells us this wisdom is pure, peaceable, and without hypocrisy. Obviously, the wisdom that speaks out of Proverbs 8 wants us to identify as the latter of these two wisdoms. She is spiritual wisdom that says to covenant youth: hearken unto me and keep my ways!

To be spiritually wise requires of covenant young people two things. First, it requires that we know the Scriptures. We must know the Scriptures as they teach us concerning God, man, Jesus Christ, salvation, the church and the last things. In short, if we are going to be wise young people, we must know our Bibles. The spiritual knowledge we are taught from infancy on must be stored away in our hearts and souls to be able to recall it when necessary. And the knowledge we speak of here is not merely an intellectual knowledge by which we know all the facts but they mean nothing to us. Knowing all about God and Jesus Christ is not enough! Our knowledge must be that of faith, a knowledge by which we know God - know Him, love Him, and fear Him. That knowledge must be

ours if we are going to be wise covenant youth. If we do not know God and Jesus Christ in this way then we are really fools and that will show up in what we do with our lives too.

To be wise, however, requires much more than a mere knowledge of our Bibles. Wisdom means we put our knowledge of God, of man, of Christ, of salvation, of the church, of the last things to good use in directing and guiding our lives. “Hearken unto me—listen to me,” wisdom says to us, “Keep my ways!” We must use the Scriptures to discern between right and wrong and then in wisdom follow in the ways of righteousness. If we cannot do this, or refuse to do this then we are fools. And though fools always enjoy the company of other fools, the fact is: they are fools! If it's cool to be a fool, then I guess a young person might laugh about his foolishness, even boast about his foolishness—and, no doubt, he'll find others to laugh and boast with him—but the fact remains when we do not use our knowledge of the Bible to guide us in the way of righteousness, we are fools!

And this is why we are fools: because wisdom in all reality is Christ! Look closely at the language wisdom uses to describe herself in Proverbs 8. It will not take long to discover that wisdom is really Christ. Christ then declares to us as covenant youth: “hearken unto me, O ye children, for blessed are they that keep my ways.” We turn our backs on our knowledge of God and His Word and ignore it. When we knowing Scripture fail to follow in its ways then we are in reality turning our backs on Jesus Christ Himself. Let no man say: “I am a child of God,” and then go out and walk in the ways of unrighteousness! Let no person say: “I am a Christian (a follower of Christ),” who goes out and lives in licentiousness! A person who walks in rebellion to the truth of the Scriptures is a fool and a fool denies Christ by virtue of his very walk!

There is a particular way we can keep the ways of wisdom and to hearken to her. Solomon speaks of this in verse 33: “hear instruction and refuse it not.” When we do this then we will be wise. Wisdom makes matters very concrete for us at this point. Here is the key to being wise: hear instruction and refuse it not! It all centers in that word instruction. This term refers to all the training, all the nurture we receive from the mouths of those whom God has placed over us in our lives for this reason. It refers to the teaching, the admonition, the care, and the example we receive from parents, godly teachers, and ministers in the church. It refers to all the labors that covenant parents and others have vowed to put into the task of teaching us the fear of the Lord. That is the instruction that makes one wise.

But if it is to make us wise, we as covenant young people are called upon to hear it! From a negative point of view to hear wisdom means we not refuse it! How wise Solomon is to put this command negatively! By doing so he lays a finger on a sore spot. Often young men and women do not think their parents are all that smart or wise. Father and mother may warn them from ways of wickedness; parents may even come right out and say “no” to something a young person desires (in fact, that is the way it ought to be). But it happens more often than not that as young people we think our parents do not know what they are talking about. They are too old to understand the ways of the young. They do not understand what it is to live in the here and now! At least, so we think! When therefore, we are instructed by them and warned by them, we refuse their instruction. We follow in what we believe is right and wrong. We do not even consider whether what they tell us is rooted in the principles of Scripture itself. We simply refuse and walk according to our own hearts. A young person can refuse instruction in other ways too. He can sleep during church or play around during catechism. By doing this we refuse instruction. He can refuse instruction when having received it by parents and others, when placed before a concrete situation and parents and others are not around, then he can choose to ignore what he learned from them and do the opposite. Solomon knows our weaknesses pretty well, does he not? Refuse not instruction! If you refuse it you will walk in ways that lead to rebellion, wantonness, intemperance, fornication and drunkenness - all sins against which Solomon warns in his proverbs. When we become fools.

Hear instruction! When it is given in the home, church or school we must listen to it carefully! We must take it and tuck it away in our hearts. Then, when it is necessary then take out that instruction

again and use it! We must open our ears when we are taught, and we must be ready to put instruction and its warnings into use when we live in this world. Then we will walk in the way of wisdom. It may not always be an easy way, but it is a sure way that leads to heaven.

When we walk in the way of wisdom we will be blessed or happy! I think that we often forget that. At times we can feel very miserable in this life. Nothing seems to go right. Life is rotten and seems to deal us one hard blow after another. When that happens, we can be quick to blame it on others. They are the reason we feel so miserable! They make life so hard on us! We become angry and bitter toward others - usually parents or teachers or ministers. But that we feel miserable is due to one thing: ourselves. We are miserable when we fail to walk in the ways of wisdom. When we do not take time out to know God and to apply His Word in a positive way to our lives, that makes us miserable. When we walk in wisdom's ways, then we are blessed by God. He makes us happy! Do you want true joy in life? It will not be found in the way of sin! God withholds gladness from those who walk in foolishness. He gives it to those who follow Christ. These are wise and these are happy! That in itself is incentive to hearken unto wisdom and keep her ways! ❖

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