

Proverbs 2:1-9

My son, if you will receive my words
And treasure my commandments within you,
Make your ear attentive to wisdom,
Incline your heart to understanding;
For if you cry for discernment,
Lift your voice for understanding;
If you seek her as silver
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will discern the fear of the Lord
And discover the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
Guarding the paths of justice,
And He preserves the way of His godly ones.
Then you will discern righteousness and justice
And equity and every good course.

To understand this passage, we need to look at it in its context. I want to refresh our minds with the Philosophy of Proverbs, as I understand it, and the principles we must use to read the book properly. The three principles are

1. Proverbs is wisdom, not law. The book expects of you a kind of functional knowledge and base level of understanding of how the world works. It is not didactic teaching or written law. It provides us with understanding by demonstrating an action, speaking to ideas with wit, and using idioms to simply complex subjects. It cuts to the quick, so to speak, engaging the core idea in play.
2. Because this book is wisdom, it provides indicatives on how the world should work or how God intended the world to work, as opposed to structured arguments and presentation.
3. Christ is the point of Proverbs. When we approach Proverbs, we must understand that this book, along with all the others of scripture, were meant to point us to Christ as our standard in all things. In the case of this book, Christ is the standard for Wisdom.

The four points of the Philosophy of Proverbs are:

1. Fear the Lord, for this is where all wisdom and knowledge come from. Fear is recognition of and thankfulness to God for what He does and Who He is, followed by diligent obedience to His commands and instructions.
2. Seek wisdom in all that we do. We should understand God's law and be practical and prudent on how we exercise it.
3. Honor your parents. Embedded in the very structure of the book is the idea of heeding your father and mother in their advise and obey that advise, often

comparing your using their wisdom as jewelry and ornaments to show to the world. This mirrors the first element of this philosophy in that honoring your parents is a form of honoring God, and the kind of relationship you have with your father is similar to that which you have with God.

4. Teach your children. Finally, corresponding to the second element of this philosophy, you are to pass on what you learn to your children, to teach them to love the Lord your God and seek wisdom. Entailed in this element is the expectation that you will be wise enough to pass wisdom on and be honorable enough to cause your children to listen. You cannot demand honor when you have not earned it.

In keeping with these ideas, the book of proverbs provides a short introduction that provides us with the intent of the book, which is communicating wisdom to fool and wise men alike, and then states the central theme of the entire book: "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." (1:7) After this theme is recited, we have 10 treatises that a father gives to his son. In the first treatise, the one we are still in, the father begins by warning his son against joining the ranks of men who seek gain through violence, stating they are fools setting traps for their own lives.

In the second part of this treatise, the father paints the picture of Wisdom as a desperate woman traveling throughout the most conspicuous places you could find someone, shouting loudly for anyone — everyone — to hear her warnings and run toward her. She offers them life, health, and peace, and yet still they ignore her. In her wrath, Wisdom tells us that she will run from them, laughing at their calamity as it falls upon them, because they refused to listen. In spite of all her warnings of love, the wicked men who seek unjust gain refuse to heed her, and their own deeds will be visited upon them. This wrath is shown in by Paul to be revealed "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks". (Romans 1:18-21) The fools in the first portion of the treatise are those who "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." (Rom 1:25) Just as the fools of Proverbs 1 "hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord" (1:29), "they shall eat of the fruit of their own way And be satiated with their own devices" (1:31), the wicked men of Romans 1 are given "over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them". (Rom 1:28-31)

This sets the stage for this third section of the treatise, where father, once again, pleads with his son to hear his words and take them to heart. After using the first two portions of this treatise to deal with the unrepentant and wicked men, the father here is contrasting what the wicked do with the wisdom he is giving to his son. Remember that the son is of an age where he can listen to his fathers instruction or ignore it. When the father speaks in this passage, he is speaking with the main goal of directing his son to follow the command given by God to teach his son to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart". (Deut 6:5-6) Mirroring this command, the father tells his son to "treasure my commandments within you". What the father is doing is fulfilling the command of God to "teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates". (Deut 6:7-9)

Reaching back to Wisdom's impassioned speech, the father then tells his son to "Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding". (2:2) Instead of being a fool like the wicked men, he wants his son to hear what Wisdom says and take her sayings to heart, just as he is to take his fathers advise to heart. He then takes it a step further. Instead of simply hearing and taking to heart, the son is now to raise his voice in response to Wisdom, lifting his voice for understanding. The son is to reach for and cry out to wisdom just as she is doing to him. While the evil ones fall further into their violent ways, the son is expected to delve deeper into the ways of Wisdom.

Even more, the father tells his son to seek for Wisdom as he would hidden treasures and silver. This strikes an interesting parallel with Christ and His parables. He says "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it". (Matt 13:44-45) You see, to even search for wisdom, you must recognize your own stupidity and ignorance. Seeking out Wisdom is an admission that you need her. In proverbs the hidden treasure is Wisdom, in Matthew the hidden treasure is the kingdom of God. So, where Christ links the Kingdom of God to Wisdom, He also says "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". (Matt 6:19-21) Remember also that He said that "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." (Matt 15:11) and "For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart". (Luke 6:43-45). In proverbs, to invest in Wisdom is to invest in

God, and thus His Kingdom. The father assures his son that this investment will pay off to the degree to which he invests in it. To the extent that the son is willing to invest in the search for the wealth of wisdom, God will reward him with skill and effectiveness in action, protection, a light to show him the way, preservation, and discernment in righteousness, justice, equity, and every good course. But to invest in finding wisdom requires a heart desirous to learn.

So, while the wicked seek to take from the poor, elevate themselves, find riches beyond measure — and despite Wisdom's continual calling for them to repent, they fall further into the evils they themselves invest in — the righteous reject cruelty toward the poor and seek balanced scales and good morals, as well as right instruction, discipline, and recognize their own weaknesses and foolishness. This is not a passive disposition. Rather, it is an active attempt to find ways to be righteous, active acknowledgeable that you are not righteous or worthy to find Wisdom, and a thankfulness to God for all the Wisdom and Righteousness He grants in His Mercy. The righteousness you have now is not enough and never was. This meeting of Wisdom — at the city gates, the front door of your home, the crossroads, the high places of the city, the town square — is one similar to two lovers actively searching for one another and finding each other everywhere. While Wisdom searches for you, search for her also, and you will find her.

But the son's search will not be random or arbitrary. He is not to look of his own accord. His search is guided and directed by God and by his father. As he searches for wisdom in accordance with his father's advice, the son will "discern the fear of the Lord And discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;" (2:5-6) Words and commandment are the starting point of wisdom, given first by God through the fathers, but also given by prophets. Much like Moses was commissioned by God to teach the Nation, which was meant to teach the fathers, who were meant to teach their children, word and command are the means by which God has chosen to provide wisdom. This is most clear to us in the scriptures, where "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet 1:21), but this extends to the fathers, magistrates, priests, and kings. From this passage, the method is not free speculation toward academic skepticism, but guided observation toward a spiritual recognition and acceptance of, and a reorientation toward, the truth that God is the source of all Wisdom and the only proper object of our Worship and Thanksgiving.

Going further, the father says that God "is a shield to those who walk in integrity, Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course." (2:7-9) Righteousness, then, being embedded in wisdom, means that to know Who God is to know how to live properly, and knowledge of how to live properly gives us insight into the Nature and Persons of God. The synonyms used in this passage end with *tusiyya*, which is sound sense or effectiveness. What this passage of proverbs is doing is creating an indisputable link between the ability to live and act effectively and the knowledge of God as God. To know one is to know the other, and to live in one is the

approach the other. These two, knowledge of God and Wisdom, are inseparable sides of the same coin.

You see, God is not selfish or stingy with righteousness. God seeks to share righteousness with you, and He has sent Wisdom out into all the world so that you can find her. That is why she is crying out for you and meeting you in the world. Not only that, He has sent His own words, empowered fathers to give us words, and given us His Image to see for ourselves. To find her, however, you must have a heart to search for her with honesty and humility. A search for her with designs for self-aggrandizement or unjust gain will only result in her fleeing from you and hiding resulting in your destruction. The father here is giving the opposing argument that he gave in the first two portions of this treatise. Whereas in the first portion, he warns against joining the wicked out of self-preservation, here he counsels his son to love wisdom so that his son can truly gain.

This promise, then, is a two-fold promise. The first promise is that shown in the first two parts of this treatise — a life of greed and wickedness is a trap for your soul that will end in your destruction. The second is the opposite found in this passage — that if you actively seek Wisdom, you will discern the Fear of the Lord and be blessed. If the son is diligent, he will be rewarded with life, protection, and peace. If the son is lazy or violent, he will be paid in death, destruction, and calamity.

The Father is closing the thought from Wisdom's speech, pointing out that the relationship between the son and Wisdom must be reciprocal. The same love Wisdom has for the son must be returned by the son for the son to gain anything from her. So, just as Wisdom raised her voice and ran after the son in the second part of this treatise, the son is told to go out and find wisdom, raising his voice and seeking her like silver. The way this is presented is similar to the love in Song of Solomon. In it, the bride says, "On my bed night after night I sought him Whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him. I must arise now and go about the city; In the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves." I sought him but did not find him". (Song 3:1-2) In another sense it mirrors the advise of the father in Proverbs 7:4: "Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," And call understanding your intimate friend;".

In both these senses, the son is called to be a lover of wisdom. To call out to her, seek her in all the places she may be found, to listen and take to heart her words, to count her as friend and sister, and to find her more valuable than all the riches he may find. But more than this, all knowledge is not gained simply by hearing the word or a law being spoken. Wisdom is gained over a lifetime of searching her out. Remember the purpose of this book: "To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion, A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel". (1:4-5) You are never so wise as to not need to hear from wisdom. You are never so young as to not be able to see her. Wisdom gives her friendship freely to all those who seek for her and seek her diligently. You must seek her your whole life, and seek her with thanksgiving and humility. To do this properly requires

traditions, teachings, experience, and the disciplined practical learning of how things work in God's world, primarily transmitted through the teachings of the father.

To take this all in, the father is fulfilling his responsibility to God by teaching his son to love Wisdom. He hands down, not only the law of God through the scriptures, but his own traditions, sayings, teachings, and disciplines for seeing Wisdom in his daily interactions with nature. In nature, the father sees that wisdom is out in the most conspicuous places and is actively seeking the edification of others. Seeing Wisdom seek the edification of others, the father acts like Wisdom, using her as a higher law above himself, and passes all that he knows to his son. As a central message of his teachings, he seeks to impart to the son a required love for Wisdom — that his son would, like him, would love wisdom. Through his love of wisdom, his son will learn to fear the Lord. He will discover knowledge of God as God. And, in response to this heart of true, genuine love of Wisdom and a Fear of the Lord, God will store up wisdom for his son, shield his son, guard his paths, preserve his way, and give him all kinds of discernment. This is the teaching to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart". (Deut 6:5-6) In New Testament language, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matt 6:33) This is the Psalm: "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers." (Psalm 1:1-3)

The lessons we are to learn from the father in this passage are these:

1. God has called us all to be true Philosophers. What I do not mean is that we must know fancy words or be academics. What I do mean is that we must reciprocate Wisdom's love for us. Wisdom seeks us out and is willing to give to us freely if we will but seek her in return. As she cries out for us, we are to cry out for her. We must be true lovers of wisdom.
2. Wisdom, or effectiveness and skill, is not something distinct from righteousness or virtue. Learning how to live effectively according to the laws of the world is righteousness. This does not mean that we are carnal people or that we adopt foolish ideologies such as consequentiality or become Machiavellian in our lives — but it does mean that we are to be perceptive, disciplined, skilled in all we do, lovers of goodness truth and beauty, and seek to understand God in all that we see. The laws of the world reflect God because they were made by Christ and made to point us to Christ. We cannot be effective without learning some thing about the nature of Christ, and the more we know the more we are held to account. As we grow in discipline, we also grow in our ability to perceive wisdom, and grow in our responsibility over how we use the wisdom we have.
3. Our love for wisdom cannot be selfish or self-aggrandizing. Our love for Wisdom must be a love for skill and effectiveness to the end that we, and those we love, fear the Lord — that is — that we Know God as God and give thanks to Him. As fathers, we are to use our wisdom to educate our children in the ways of God and

to lead our wives in Godly action. Wives, it is your Christian duty to teach your children and edify your husbands. Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents, learn their ways, mimic them, and learn as much from your parents as you can, ultimately surpassing them.

4. Above all, we are to Fear the Lord. This really cannot be stated enough or with enough emphasis. Our Lord is Christ, and we must recognize him as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven". (Col 1:15-23) In recognizing Christ as such, we are to give thanks to Him for all that He has given, resolving in our own minds, and teaching to our children, to "Make [our] ear[s] attentive to wisdom, Incline [our] heart[s] to understanding; For if [we] cry for discernment, Lift [our] voice[s] for understanding; If [we] seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then [we] will discern the fear of the Lord And discover the knowledge of God."

Amen