

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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(Proverbs, No. 14)

SUBJECT: INTEGRITY OF WISDOM

TITLE: WISDOM PRODUCES INTEGRITY

TEXT: PROVERBS 2:7

INTRODUCTION. The word is integrity. Integrity is not so much a word I want to define, as it is a word that illustrates and explains actions and behavior. In this series on wisdom from the heart of the WISDOM LITERATURE in the Bible, there are two things that continually cry out for attention and for amplification. First, the wisdom of God is not the wisdom of the world. Paul stressed that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. God's wisdom is not to be equated with human intellect, brilliance, or sophistication. It is not bestowed mystically, regardless of what the latest Hollywood star to come under the spell of eastern mysticism may tell you. For the New Testament saint, true wisdom begins with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and progresses with the daily filling of the Holy Spirit - in other words, as we "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

In the second place, wisdom in the Bible always has a moral quality. In Proverbs, wisdom is directly related to one's character and integrity. He is no wise man who dishonors God, disrespects others, and disgraces his family. The Bible has another word for the immoral person, the dishonest person, or the violent person - not a very pleasant word, either. It calls him a fool. Please remember that I did not call you a fool, God did. He is qualified to make the distinction between a fool and a wise man.

I. THE BIBLE PLACES A PREMIUM ON INTEGRITY.

A. The Patriarch Job Stands Among the Greatest Examples of Integrity.

1. God highly approved the integrity of Job (Job 2:3).

"And the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause.'"

2. Job's wife recognized the integrity of her husband (Job 2:9).

3. Eliphaz appealed to Job's integrity, (4:6).

Eliphaz was wrong in his assessment of Job's suffering and his condemnation of his friend's refusal to confess some horrible sin that had brought down the wrath of God upon him. But he does give

us some insight into the high value wise men of his day placed on integrity.

4. Bildad appealed to the value of integrity, even when he misjudged Job (Job 8:20).

5. Job declared, “Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me” (Job 27:5).

“Let Him weigh me with accurate scales, And let God know my integrity” (Job 31:6).

B. David Was a Man of Integrity.

1. He reveals this in the Psalms.

“Vindicate me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and my integrity that is in me” (Ps. 7:8).

“Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, For I wait for Thee” (Ps. 25:21).

2. David walked in integrity (Ps. 26:1).

“Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity; And I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.”

II. GODLY WISDOM PLACES A HIGH VALUE ON INTEGRITY.

A. The Connection Between Godly Wisdom and Integrity Is Undeniable.

1. “The integrity of the upright will guide them” (Pro. 11:3).

2. Godly wisdom will “keep to the paths of the righteous” (Pro. 2:20).

B. The Lord Blesses Those Who Walk in Integrity.

1. He is their shield and defender (Pro. 2:7).

“He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity.”

“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life...” (Pro. 10:11).

2. Integrity is to be preferred to riches (Pro. 11:4).

“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death.”

3. Those who walk in integrity bless their children (Pro. 20:7).

“A righteous man who walks in his integrity-- How blessed are his sons after him.”

Let's put this to the test. I am thinking of a man whose wealthy was legend in north Mississippi. Everyone had a John B. Michaels story (not his real name). Let me share a couple. Remember, this happened many years ago. John B. had an acute attack of appendicitis and was rushed to the Baptist hospital in Memphis for emergency surgery. He dressed like a field hand, had a three day growth of beard, and spoke with a distinct impediment.

The day after the surgery the doctor came in with a nurse and after checking his condition, addressed a matter that concerned both the surgeon and the hospital - how much could this man afford to pay? The doctor, said, “Mr. Michaels, I am only going to charge you seventy-five dollars for the surgery. Can you pay that much?”

“Yes sir. I sure appreciate it too, potner!”

“How do you want to pay it?”, they asked.

“I pay by check. I pay by check.”

Doubtfully, they asked, “Are you sure you can write a check for seventy-five dollars?”

“Call the Jonestown bank and ask them if a check for seventy-five dollars would be good.”

They reached an officer of the bank and asked, “Can you tell us if a check by John B. Michaels for seventy-five dollars would be good?”

“Yes sir, or for seventy-five thousand dollars.”

Most people agreed that the Baptist hospital was no place for the language the doctor used on the next visit to his patient's room.

I had only seen John B. one time when I was with a friend, but I knew where he lived and had no problem finding his place when I was asked to check something for the Quitman County, MS, ASCS (under the USDA). I worked summers for several years for the ASCS. The rules required us to check on all land a farmer had in Conservation Reserve every time we visited a farm, but a supervisor told me not to worry about it on this visit because it would take half a day just to see it all. The next time I was in the office, the manager asked me about it and when I told him what the supervisor said, he said, “I don't care if it takes all day, we have to see it.”

Mr. Michaels was driving me from one large field to another so I could report what was on it - in other words, that he was not growing a crop on what he had in Conservation Reserve. He was

speeding down a gravel road in his old truck when we approached the intersection where our road Teed into another road. Suddenly, Mr. Michaels said something like, “Oook boways, oook boways!” He whipped around the corner and hit the accelerator again. About ten seconds later, I realized that he had been telling me to “Look both ways! Look both ways!”

Mr. Michaels stopped by the nearest John Deere dealership one day at lunch time. Everyone had gone to lunch but one new salesman. John B. looked at a large new tractor and several implements, asking questions as he moved around the room. The salesman was trying to humor the old man who hardly looked like a person who could afford a used tractor.

Finally, John B. said, “I think I’ll take ‘em, Son.”

The salesman had been stalling, hoping someone would get back from lunch in time to help him out of this awkward situation, but now he could stall no longer: “Take what, Mr. Michaels?”

“All of it, Son, all of it; the tractor and all the equipment.”

Because of the speech impediment, he was trying to be sure he understood the farmer. Nervously looking for someone who might help, but seeing no one, he asked, “How do you want to would you like to finance it.?”

Mr. Michaels exclaimed, “I pay cash, I pay cash” - as he pointed to a cashiers check on the counter.

“What bank do you want to write the check on, Mr. Michaels?”

“Any of ‘em, Son, any of’ em!” Yours is close, we’ll just use it.”

The door opened and in walked the manager and some salesmen. As they walked by, he turned to one and informed him that the old farmer over there by the tractor wants to but that tractor and all the implements. “What do Ido?”

“Sell it to him!”

Mr. Michaels kept his son in a framed tenant house on his farm because he was afraid he was waste any money he gave him. John B. died and his son inherited the farm. Now, only a few older neighbors will even remember John B.

Now, let me ask you if you have ever heard the name, Jim Elliot? That’s the one, the missionary who was killed by the Auca Indians a half a century ago. Elizabeth Elliot was married to him and because of her books, speaking engagements, and radio programs she has kept his memory alive. But it is more than that. If Jim Elliot had been a fool, we would not be interested today. We are interested because of the wisdom and integrity of Jim Elliot. He is still quoted today:

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep for what he cannot lose.”

“Be sure when it comes time to die, all you have to do is die.”

Who was Jim Elliot? Some wise old sage? No, he was a twenty-six year old missionary, a member of a team of five young missionaries who were brutally slaughtered by a remote tribe of Indians they were trying to reach with the Gospel. By the way, pilot Nate Saint’s sister spend most of her life ministering to those same Indians, including the men who killed her brother. A few years ago I read that Nate Saint’s son had gone to Ecuador to work with the Aucas. The world might have called Jim Elliot and his friends a fool, but these young men were men of integrity and wisdom.

C. Only a Fool Rejects Integrity, (Pro. 19:1-3).

*“Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool. Also it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, And he who makes haste with his feet errs. **The foolishness of man subverts his way,** And his heart rages against the LORD.”*

1. Solomon must have seen a lot of fools in his day.

He was certainly inspired to write enough about fools:

“And a babbling fool will be thrown down” (Pro. 10:10).

“Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool...” (Pro. 10:23).

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (Pro. 12:15).

2. Solomon warns us to avoid a fool, 14:7-9.

“Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, But the folly of fools is deceit. Fools mock at sin, But among the upright there is good will.”

3. The fool is destined to failure and sorrow.

“A fool is arrogant and careless” (Pro. 14:16).

“He who begets a fool does so to his sorrow, And the father of a fool has no joy” (Pro. 17:21).

4. A fool is one who rejects godly wisdom.

“A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is prudent” (Pro. 15:5).

Let us understand one thing up front - the Bible is not condemning individual who are slow learners, people who have other learning problems, or those with a low IQ. One who is brilliant in the eyes of the world may be a fool before God. Who could be a greater fool than a scientist who looks at the design behind the universe and announces that there is no God? Or the archaeologist who sees the proof inscribed in stone and still rejects evidence that supports the authenticity of the Word of God? Perhaps the greatest fool of all is the creature, created in the image of God, who looks his Creator in the face and declares, “I don't want you!”

A fool is a doctor who becomes addicted to alcohol or drugs. A fool is a lawyer who breaks the law for profit. A fool is a scientist who “doctors” the evidence to give the world another “link” in the evolutionary chain - hey, it has happened!

III. GODLY WISDOM STILL PURSUES INTEGRITY.

A. The Fool Hates the Wisdom of God.

1. The fool rejects the righteousness of God.

Amos wrote, “They hate him who reproveth in the gate, And they abhor him who speaks with integrity” (Amos 5:10). Paul writes:

*“For it is written, “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in **the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God**, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”* (1 Cor. 1:10-21).

2. The fool will not prosper in his ways.

“The wise of heart will receive commands, But a babbling fool will be thrown down” (Pro. 10:8).

“Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous” (Ps. 1:5).

B. Godly Wisdom Will Still Pursue Righteousness.

1. The New Testament emphasis in on righteousness.
2. When a person is born again he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
3. The Holy Spirit works within to conform us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

For many months Americans everywhere were wearing WWJD bracelets - What Would Jesus Do? You have seen the letters on jewelry, cards, bumper stickers, and tee-shirts. Let me risk being accused of heresy. I would urge you to concentrate on Romans 8:29. As you are conformed to the image of Christ, you will more and more find yourself doing what Jesus would do.

The emphasis should not be on doing what one thinks Jesus would do, but upon a full surrender to the Holy Spirit, Who will nurture and mold us into the image of Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus." When you begin to think like Jesus Christ you will begin to behave like Jesus. There is a word for that. It is called Sanctification.

To be perfectly honest, and we might be surprised at what Jesus would do. In the first place we could never do exactly as Jesus would do. He was perfect in every way, "in all points tempted as we, yet without sin.?" He had no fallen nature and we do. The point is that we could try to imitate Christ without being conformed to His image. But if we are conformed to His image, we will seek, more and more, to live as Jesus would have us to live.

4. There are many examples of the wisdom of integrity and the integrity of wisdom today.

ILLUSTRATION. Bob, an ex-marine, had found a job as a draftsman with Texaco back around 1960. He was a young man with a family - and a good job. Then came the strike. He needed money to pay the bills, but there was no indication that the strike was about to be settled any time soon. His friend, Vance, told him that his brother needed someone to paint his porch. Bob drove to the house in Port Arthur and met Vance's brother, who showed him the porch. After he had looked at the job, Vance's brother asked, "How much will you charge to paint it?"

Bob thought, "It is a thirty dollar job, but if I tell him thirty he may get someone else to do it and I have to have some money now." So he said, "I will paint it for twenty dollars."

"I'll give you thirty."

Vance's brother was a man of integrity. And Bob began collecting stories of honesty and integrity.

ILLUSTRATION. An elderly Cajun man moved to Nederland, Texas, to near his family. Bob, by then a supervisor of draftsmen for Texaco, often talked with Brother Joe at church, and Brother Joe often mentioned the home and friends he had left behind. One day, Bob told Brother Joe he would

take a day off and drive him back to his home in south Louisiana. He told him he would like to see his home and meet some of his relatives. The day came for the trip and Brother Joe was excited about the trip. He talked with Bob all the way to his former home, often mentioning a cousin he wanted him to meet. After the tour, Brother Joe directed Bob to the local court house. Brother Joe's cousin, an elected parish official, he was in his office.

Bob confided that Brother Joe's cousin was the most arrogant, obnoxious person he thought he had ever met. Edwin Edwards was the governor of Louisiana, and Brother Joe's cousin laced his conversations with references to "Edwin and me." On the way back to Nederland, Brother Joe asked, "Well, Bob, what did you think of my cousin?" Bob had dreaded that question from the time he met

the cousin. But you see, Bob was a man of integrity. So was Brother Joe, for that matter. Bob loved Brother Joe but he would not lie to keep from hurting his feelings.

So, he said, "Brother Joe, if you had not asked me I was not going to say anything. But since you asked I am going to tell you the truth. I didn't like your cousin at all."

"Don't nobody like my cousin."

He never explained why it was so important for Bob to meet his cousin.

ILLUSTRATION. Bob was looking for some land about an hour north of Nederland and Beaumont, Texas. Someone told him about a man who had a small farm for sale, so Bob drove to the man's place and asked about the land. The landowner walked Bob all over the place. Ever so often, they would come to a pot hole, or an eroded gully. A definite impression began to form in his mind. This man is walking me to every blemish on his place! That was not what he had expected of a man who was trying to sell his farm. When he returned to Nederland he found his friend and told his what had happened. He asked, "Is he the kind of man who would quietly lead me to every weak spot on the place so that I could not miss it?"

"That's exactly the kind of man he is, and just what I would expect of him." Another man of integrity.

CONCLUSION. What about you? Are you a person of integrity? Are you being conformed to the image of Christ today? If you do not understand what I am talking about, I would like to tell you how you may know and understand the wisdom of God, and the integrity of God.

INVITATION. I am going to ask you to call upon the Lord Jesus Christ for his great salvation. Trust Him and He will give you eternal life. If you know Him as Savior, ask him to fill you with His Spirit, with wisdom from above, and the blessings He promises along with it.

