

A Benefits Package, part 1

(Proverbs 17:1-8)

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Introduction

For most of human history, the benefit of work was survival...

People worked to provide clothing, shelter and food for their tables or they traded their skills for clothing, shelter and food..

Then the industrial revolution occurred and many workers left the farm to help build the factories and the infrastructure of the city..

This created competition among employers who wanted to attract the best and most productive workers...

Therefore, the idea of fringe benefits became part of what it meant to be an employee..

Not only were businesses going to pay an hourly wage for the labor of employees, they were going to offer additional benefits to attract the best workers and keep them..

As a result, companies began offering retirement packages, health, life, disability and all sorts of insurances..

Some companies even offered housing and car allowances to attract the better employees..

And the list goes on and one to where companies even became sharing some of the profits of the company with employees...

This idea of fringe or employee benefits still exists today...

And it still causes people to take less desirable jobs simply because their benefit package is better..

Well, what are the benefits of choosing to listen to and live by the wisdom of God?

Clearly, one benefit is to please the Lord...

There is no greater joy than to bring joy to our God through our attention and obedience to His Word...

And certainly our pursuit of wisdom is pleasing to God...

But are there other benefits of wisdom to us personally?

And the Bible would say, “Yes! There are benefits of wisdom to us personally.”

Wisdom helps us live skillfully in the world...

Wisdom helps us to find happiness and joy in a fallen world..

Wisdom helps us make daily decisions with clarity instead of confusion...

So, yes there is benefit in the pursuit and acquisition of wisdom...

The primary benefit is our obedience to God, but the secondary benefit is our blessing in this world...

So, tonight in Proverbs 17, we are simply going to list the fringe benefits of wisdom...

And Proverbs 17 is very difficult to outline, so this is going to be more of a listing of wisdom's benefits in this chapter...

We will begin with benefit #1 found in verse 1...

I. A Benefit of Wisdom is Peace (1)

Let's read verse 1...

***1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it
Than a house full of feasting with strife.***

In verse 1, we see what we call a “better than” statement in the book of Proverbs...

WE have seen this before from Solomon, who uses them to convince us and motivate us to seek wisdom...

And the argument he makes is this...

It is better to have a dry morsel and quietness than a full meal with drama...

A dry morsel would be the equivalent to a saltine cracker...

So the idea is this...

It is better to have a meal of saltines with quietness around you than the best steak surrounded by strife..

WE often complain of the quietness of our homes at times, yet quietness is not bad...

Silence is not judgment from God but often a reward for the righteous...

Drama and strife in a family are often judgment from God..

And when there is trouble in a house, no meal tastes that good, but where there is love and peace, even the saltine cracker tastes delicious...

It is often our nature to envy the rich and their lifestyle and their possessions and even their fancy meals...

But a good steak is no substitute for a good home...

Wisdom leads to peace in your life, in your job and in your home..

Foolishness is the road to strife and drama and arguments and unhappiness..

So fringe benefit #1 of wisdom is the peace and quiet at the dinner table...

A second fringe benefit of wisdom is honor...

II. A Benefit of Wisdom is Honor (2)

Let's read verse 2...

***2 A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son
who acts shamefully,
And will share in the inheritance among brothers.***

The world honors those who are born into the right household...

If you are born into a household of wealth, life is going to be relatively easy for you in this world..

The wealthy are able to make their way in the world by the power of money...

Yet, even the wealthy have shameful behavior that is not excused by their abundance...

The stories of wealthy kids getting into trouble are too numerous to count...

And the point of this proverb is that God plays no favorites in the world...

Your money will not buy favor and honor from God..

The way to an honorable life is God's wisdom...

And that is so true that even the son of a servant in a wealthy household may get more of the inheritance than a legitimate son...

Stories of family members being left out of wills only to be replaced by household employees are plentiful in our country...

Leona Helmsley, a real estate billionaire even cut two grandchildren out of her will and gave their 12 million share to her dog..

And though Helmsley wasn't a believer, she understands that people aren't entitled to something just because they were born to certain people..

Sometimes the faithful servant is more deserving than the shameful son...

The way to honor in this world is not through a family name but through through wise behavior...

A third benefit of wisdom is found in verse 3...

III. A Benefit of Wisdom is Insight (3)

99% of the questions that a 5 year old asks begin with the word the word “why”?

Why is that happening daddy?

Why can't I go daddy?

Why must I wear jeans and not shorts daddy?

Why must I brush my teeth daddy?

Well, not much changes as we grow older..

WE often ask “why” to our heavenly father?

But understand this...

Sometimes we ask a question to the Lord that he has already answered in his Word...

It is simply reveals our own ignorance of His Word when we ask the question...

Now a common “why” question concerns the presence of trials in our life, and the common question is often phrased like this...

“Why would God allow me to go through this?”

Well, Proverbs 17:3 gives us an answer that is repeated in other parts of the Bible, but here is how Solomon puts it...

3

***The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,
But the Lord tests hearts.***

Simply put, the trials of life tests our faith just like the refinery an furnace tests the silver and gold in them...

Think of it this way...

A lump of dirt is thrown into the furnace, and the heat of the furnace destroys the grass, the rocks, the dirt away as the lump travels through the furnace...

But the gold is not destroyed so that when it exits the furnace, all that is left is the gold...

The same is true for the trials of life...

We head into those trials often with a lot of baggage that needs to be burned off in the furnace of the trial...

Our worries, our fears, our lack of trust, our disobedience are all destroyed in the heat of the trial so by the time that we come out of it, all that is left of us is our faith..

Which like gold is the only thing of real value in our lives...

And so wisdom tells us that the furnace of a trial tests and refines our faith...

Now look, some people go in the furnace and nothing comes out the other end of any value...

It isn't that they die, but their faith doesn't survive the fire...

They end up cursing God in the trial...

They end up leaving the church...

Or reading their Bibles...

Or head back to their sin...

And in that case, the testing of their faith was helpful in the sense that it revealed their lack of it...

So even failed tests are good if people respond to them with true repentance and faith in Christ...

Now, all of that truth in verse 3 is a benefit of Bible reading and proper interpretation...

Because the Bible gives us insight into the ways of God...

And that is a benefit of trying to get wisdom..

It helps us understand ourselves and the world in which we live...

You see, unbelievers struggle to make sense of the world and their lives...

Why did this happen?

Why is this happening to me?

And quite often, their questions are answered clearly in the Bible, but they suffer from the ignorance of the Word of God...

And therefore they struggle with difficult questions that face them in life...

The people of God may not have all the answers but if we seek wisdom, we will have way more answers than questions about this world...

So a benefit of wisdom is insight into the ways of God...

A fourth benefit of wisdom is found in verses 4-5 and verses 7-8...

IV. A Benefit of Wisdom is Discernment (4-5: 7-8)

Let's read verses 4 and 5..

4

*An evildoer listens to wicked lips;
A [b]liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.*

5

*He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker;
He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.*

The point of verse 4 is easy to identify..

Wise people don't pay attention to wicked and destructive speech...

So what can be classified as destructive as wicked and destructive speech?

Verse 5 helps us out..

The person who mocks the poor and the person who rejoices at the calamity of others...

Why is mocking the poor wrong?

Well even the poor are made in the image of God.

And to mock them or really anyone is to mock the one who made them...

I had a friend in middle school whose mom drove an old beat up car..

I am talking about dents and rust and a door that was tan while the rest of the car was green...

Well, we laughed at that car every time it pulled up to drop him off at school...

But one day, he had enough of our joking...

And he simply said, "The next time you make fun of my mom's car, it will be the same as making fun of my mom. And nobody does that."

Well look, he was a big guy, so we all stopped our joking.

But the point was clear.

My mom owns that car, and to ridicule the car was equal to ridiculing her...

The same is true of the Lord.

He has made everyone in His image, and to mock someone is to mock God...

If we as a people would understand that and apply to our speech the world would drastically change overnight...

Now look, are there people in the world who are the enemies of God?

Are there people in the world engaged in horrible sin against God?

And the answer is clearly yes..

Are we allowed to mock these people?

No.

Why?

Because even they are made in the image of God, and to mock them is to mock God..

Instead, we should pray for our enemies..

We should preach the gospel to them..

We should desire to see them come to Christ..

This is the problem with American politics at the moment...

Both sides are busy mocking the other side, and God is not pleased since all of us are made in his image...

Now it is interesting to note that Solomon specifically points out the poor here...

Though all mocking of others is wrong since all are made by God, the poor get the attention of Solomon here..

Why the poor?

Well, the poor are easy targets..

Every area of the world has a poor population, so you don't have to look far to find a poor person to mock...

But they are also targets since most people assume that the poor are in their situation because of some great sin they committed..

And yes, that can be true but it isn't always true..

There are poor people who work as God commands and who live as God commands, yet they never get out of poverty..

Not all poorness is a judgment from God.

But people often assume it is and they jump on the bandwagon of mocking the poor...

As the second half of verse 5 says, they rejoice in the calamity of the poor...

But that could also include being happy when bad things happen to people...

We must avoid that attitude as believers..

We can't and shouldn't rejoice at the downfall of others...

That is destructive speech...

Look, I can't rejoice that Judas hanged himself after his betrayal of Christ...

That was tragic and sad and sinful, and I cannot rejoice at the sin of others...

For instance, I can't rejoice that all these Hollywood actors are going down due to their sexually immoral acts on women..

Though they may represent the ungodly nature of Hollywood, I should grieve over these sins and not celebrate it as some in the world are doing...

The same would be true when politicians on either side of the aisle get caught up in scandal...

My heart shouldn't rejoice when a democrat falls into sin anyone that my heart shouldn't rejoice when a republican does the same..

Yet, we live in a culture that celebrates the calamity of other people, and that often spills into the Christian community...

But that is wrong.

Look, a very popular leader of a church fell into sin, and as much as I disagreed with him on things he said in pulpits, I couldn't rejoice in his calamity...

I couldn't mock his fall.

It was tragic simply because it reflected badly on the church..

And why do people mock and rejoice at others demise?

To elevate themselves.

It makes them feel better about themselves..

Yet as they step on the poor or anyone else in their mocking, they essentially step on God who has created everyone in his image...

Do you know why a racist joke is wrong?

Because that joke mocks a person of another skin color who was also made in God's image.

When you hear a joke like this, walk away from it...

If not, you wont find yourself laughing at the joke, you will find yourself laughing at God...

Wise people don't take part in mocking others and celebrating their demise...

Now, verses 7-8 are closely related to verses 4-5...

7

***[c]Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool,
Much less are lying lips to a prince.***

8

***A bribe is a [d]charm in the sight of its owner;
Wherever he turns, he prospers.***

In verses 4-5, the wisdom is not to listen to and take part in destructive speech...

In verses 7-8, the wisdom is to be aware of the words of others in identifying who they are...

Verse 7 says that fools don't offer excellent speech...

And princes don't speak lies...

Verse 8 says that people who offer bribes or gifts deserve our attention...

Now, let's make a couple important notes here...

#1 - There are foolish people who can speak with excellence..

#2- There are plenty of princes who lie..

#3 - There are well meaning people who offer gifts to you with no strings attached...

But the overall message of these verses is to let the speech and actions of a person help you identify who they are...

If you hear excellent speech out of people (which should be defined as righteous and godly speech), you can assume that the person is wise and not foolish...

If you hear a prince or government officials speak,
you should expect the truth...

If you get a gift from someone, it could possibly be
a bribe to benefit the person giving it more than it
benefits you..

In other words, wisdom helps us to be discerning...

Wisdom helps us identify what is God-honoring and
what is not God-honoring in the world...

Wisdom helps us identify those who belong to the
Lord and those who don't belong to the Lord..

A benefit of godly wisdom is that it makes us care-
ful listeners in the world...

If we hear speech that is slanderous and gossipy and
mocks other people and rejoices when others fall,
we begin to understand the character of the person
who is speaking..

If you are around people who love to insult and
ridicule others and tell dirty jokes and mock other
people because of their skin color or culture, you
begin to understand the person you are dealing
with..

A person who shows no respect for people made in God's image show that they have no respect for God...

If you are around people who don't speak with excellence and tell lies, then don't be foolish enough to think they are good, God-fearing people.

They aren't.

If you are around people who flatter with gifts and empty speech, take note of that when they come to you with a gift...

You see, God's wisdom helps us make wise choices in the world so that we stay away from people with destructive and evil tongues..

And we are careful around people who speak foolishly and deceitfully...

A fifth benefit of wisdom is found in verse 6..

V. A Benefit of Wisdom is Influence (6)

Let's read verse 6...

6

***Grandchildren are the crown of old men,
And the glory of sons is their fathers.***

Now, we all understand that this proverb comes with a disclaimer...

And that disclaimer is this...

Not all grandchildren are the glory of their grandparents...

And not all children listen to their fathers...

So we understand that verse 6 is not a promise but a principle of life that comes with an unwritten assumption...

And the assumption is that parents are going to bring their children up in the fear and instruction of the Lord...

And generally when that happens on a consistent basis and parents live what they teach their children, the outcome is the truth of verse 6...

And that outcome is best seen in a faith in the Lord that lasts for generations in families..

That is why a benefit of a wise life is the influence on the next generation...

You see, the greatest source of influence in society are parents...

God designed the world in such a way that parents are given the responsibility of passing the love of the Lord to the next generation...

And they do this through their influence on their children...

And let's be clear...

Influence works both ways...

You can't read the Bible to your kids and expect them to obey when you don't obey yourself...

How dare a parent preach the importance of church attendance while dropping their kids off at the door while they head back home...

Influence happens all the time..

And if your words about the Lord match your life in response to the Lord, that influence is so powerful that it can carry on even to your grandchildren...

And they can become a crown of glory though they are a generation removed from you..

Now, dont miss the second half of verse 6...

You see, old men could also be translated old women...

So the idea of grandparents is appropriate in the first half of verse 6..

But the word for father in the second half of verse 6 can only be translated as father or grandfather, which shows us the importance of fathers in families...

Now why does God single out fathers here?

Simple put, they are the spiritual leaders of the home..

Therefore, much influence comes from them...

If you have a lazy, half-committed Christian father, dont be surprised by lazy, half-committed Christian children of that father...

If you have a father who fakes his Christianity, don't be surprised by his children faking their Christianity..

On the other hand, if you have a committed and obedient Christian father, don't be surprised by committed and obedient children...

Now we all understand that we can't save our children..

We can't create a faith in our kids or grandkids...

Only God can change hearts and open the ears to the gospel...

But we also should understand that God allows us loads of influence in the life of our children..

That is why you see a breakdown in our culture because we see a breakdown in the family...

And when the family, especially the father gives up his role of influencing the next generation to follow the Lord, the next generation suffers greatly...

Absent fathers are a death to a society and nation, but don't think just because some fathers aren't absent it means they are a great influence...

Many fathers hang around the house, but the kids may be better off if they had left because their influence isn't godly at all..

Look, the goal of our lives as as parents and grandparents is to live in such a way that the second half of verse 6 is true about us...

We are the glory of our children and grandchildren...

Which simply means that our children are proud of us...

They adore us...

They listen to us..

They honor us...

The opposite of glory is shame...

Dont live that your kids are ashamed of you..

Live for the Lord so that your kids are proud of you and they listen to the influence you speak into their life..

This is the benefit of wisdom...

It teaches us that a life well lived influences those around us for the better..

And there are no dearer folks around us than our our children...

So live a life that loves the Lord in hopes that you kids will grow up to love the Lord in the same way you do...

Conclusion

Ill wrap up our night like this...

The first job I took after college was at Midway BBQ..

The son-in-law of the owner sat me down and asked me if I was interested in working there..

And as college graduate with a lot of school debt and months away from marriage, I said absolutely yes...

In my mind, I was ready for a paycheck...

But then he told me that he would buy me a life insurance policy and help me with health insurance and hopefully contribute to a new car suited for me to cater...

Well as we say in the south, that was gravy...

I didn't ask for any of that, but he was kind enough to add those fringe benefits to lure me in...

Look, if God has just saved me, it would have been enough...

But not only does God save, he changes us while he leaves us here...

And the Bible's wisdom is such a fringe benefit of salvation because it offers wisdom from God about how to live skillfully in the world....

I would have been crazy to tell my boss to keep those things...

And we are just as foolish when we dont grab hold of the wisdom that God offers in the book of Proverbs to make our lives better...

Let us pray.

VI. A Benefit of Wisdom is Restraint (9-14)