That's a Big "If"

(Proverbs 2)
8/9/17; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

There were many reasons the South eventually lost the Civil War, but many experts see he turning part of the war as the defeat of southern troops at the Battle of Antietam in Maryland…

This battle was the bloodiest battle of the Civil War, with over 22,000 troops killed, injured or missing..

But the greatest significance of the battle was it turned back Robert E. Lee's invasion of the north…

After Antietam, Lee retreated back to Virginia and though there would be plenty more battles, many Civil War experts claim that Lee's retreat marked the beginning of the end for the south…

Now, what is interesting about Antietam is that the south was winning the war up to this point…

They were only a short distance from capturing Washington DC, which would hopefully lead to a quick end to the war…

Yet, when the south lost Antietam, it essentially lost the war…

Now the reason for this surprise defeat could be traced back to a careless decision of a Confederate general named DH Hill…

Hill had received an order from Robert E Lee that detailed the south's battle plans for their advance into the northern territories..

It was special order 191, yet instead of destroying the piece of paper that contained the order or taking care to hide the order..

Hill wrapped the order around 3 cigars and somehow managed to lose the order while moving his troops one morning…

Later that day or the next morning, a Union solider found the order, took it to his superior and eventually the southern order fell into the hands of northern army commanders…

As a result, the northern army was better prepared and able to fight off Lee's advances, cause Lee to retreat and change the course of history..

And if you think about it, the course of American history and 1000s of lives were changed by a careless decision on how to handle a piece of paper.

Though General Hill never knew the importance of his decision until after the fact, that is how life can hinge on a single decision…

Such a life-changing decision is the subject of Proverbs 2, which really comes to us as an "if-then" kind of chapter…

We all understand these statements…

If you do this, then you will get this…

If General Hill had destroyed the order from Lee and not wrapped it around 3 cigars, then the south would have probably won the war…

But the "if" didn't happen and therefore the then didn't happen as well…

Such is the challenge of Proverbs 2,…

If you pursue wisdom, then you benefit from it…

If you refuse wisdom, then sad consequences are the result…

So, let's look at this second chapter of the book of Proverbs in 4 parts…

We will begin with the call of wisdom in verses 1-4.

I. The Call of Wisdom (1-4)

Verse 1…

1 My son, if you will receive my words
And treasure my commandments within you,
2
Make your ear attentive to wisdom,
Incline your heart to understanding;
3
For if you cry for discernment,
[a]Lift your voice for understanding;
4
If you seek her as silver
And search for her as for hidden treasures;

The opening section of chapter 2 is simply the call of wisdom that goes out to everyone in the world..

And God phrases it as the "if" section of an "if-then" statement…

If a person will receive the words of the Lord's wisdom…

If they will treasure the wise commandments of God…

IF they will give their ear to wisdom..

If they will incline their heart to understand the words of God…

If they will cry out in prayer for wisdom and understanding…

If they will seek knowledge…

This is the call of wisdom to the people of the world but also to those simple minded people in the church…

And look at all the action words in the call of wisdom..

Receive….

Treasure….

Make your ear attentive..

Incline your heart..

Cry out…

And then look at all the names for wisdom…

My Words..

My commandments..

Wisdom..Discernment..Understanding…

And so what you see in verses 1-4 is a description of our response to the Word of God, which is the source of wisdom…

Receive the word of God, which is encouragement to put yourself in places where the Word is taught…

Whether that is personal Bible study or in the church or wherever..

You have to receive the word before there is any benefit to it..

Then treasure it..

In other words, store in to your memory..

Meditate on it by bringing it to mind throughout the day…

Then as your mediate on it, pay attention to it…

Give your heart to it…

This would suggest not just reading or studying the Word without giving any thought to it, but reading and studying with purpose…

Then cry out in prayer to God for a better undemanding of his Word…

You see wisdom is available and accessible, but you must seek it and ask for understanding of it and then put it into your heart and obey it…

So, that is the call of wisdom and those are the actions of a person who wants to respond to the call of wisdom in the right way..

Now, let's look at the benefits of wisdom in verses 5-11…

II. The Benefits of Wisdom (5-11)

Verse 5 begins with the "then" part that follows the "if" part of God's proposition to mankind…

IF you seek wisdom in the proper way, then you will be blessed and benefit from wisdom in a number of ways…

The first benefits of wisdom is found in verse 5…

5
Then you will discern the fear of the Lord
And discover the knowledge of God.

The old saying is that "knowledge is power."

And there is truth in that because knowledge allows a person to make informed decisions…

Those without knowledge make blind decisions…

And a man without knowledge of God will die in his sins…

But if a man seeks wisdom from God, he will grow in his knowledge of God and in his love of God…

It is amazing how much people will study the things that interest them…

I can stand up here and share hours of information about how to fish for largemouth bass…

I can speak for along time about the game of golf..

And why is that?

Because I have filled my mind with knowledge of those things…

Read articles, listened and watched things on the internet…

Taken part in going fishing and playing golf, so I lots of knowledge about those things…

But guess what?

What I know about golf and fishing is much less important than what I know about God…

Those things can serve me on earth, but what I know about God can serve me beyond this earth…

Why seek knowledge of temporary things when I can fill my mind with the eternal knowledge of the Lord?

So a great benefit of wisdom is it increases our knowledge of the Creator of all things..

And look at verse 6 with shows us another benefit of seeking the wisdom of God…

And that is the fact that it is easily found…

Verse 6…

6
For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
7
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;

Anna's latest career interest is becoming an orthodontist…

So we looked up the education required to become one….

The answer?

Roughly 10 years of school and 1000s of dollars of debt…

10 years is a large number in my mind to gain the knowledge to begin a orthodontic practice…

Yet, that is hard it is to access that wisdom and attain the requirements to be orthodontist…

Thankfully, the knowledge and wisdom is God is way more accessible….

God gives wisdom to us through his word..

Every word of the Bible has been breathed out by God…

His mouth has produced wisdom for us that is very accessible and available…

God has in fact stored up wisdom in His Word..

From Genesis to Revelation is a storehouse of God's wisdom…

It amazes me how many people lack the wisdom of the Bible…

I have had people come to me for counsel on something that the Bible clearly forbids…

So, when they ask me, "what should I do?"

My first response is always, what does the Bible command you to do?

And if you don't know, dig and pray for that wisdom until you find it in the Bible…

God has made it available and accessible and benefit to seek wisdom is that it can be easily found in the Scriptures….

But not only can wisdom grow our knowledge of God and be easily found…

Wisdom leads your steps…

Look back at the second part of verse 7 down to verse 9…

He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
8
Guarding the paths of justice,
And He preserves the way of His godly ones.
9
Then you will discern righteousness and justice
And equity and every good course.

Godly wisdom protects those who seek it like a shield…

Godly wisdom also serve as guard rails for your way in the world…

By guarding your path and preserving your way..

I used to love those cars at Carowinds that were in the kiddie section of the park…

As a little kid, you always wished you could drive a car…

So when you go to Carowinds, there were these colorful cars that had wheels and steering wheels and gas and brakes…

But the catch is that they could only run on one path…

There was a steel beam down the middle the road and even if you let steering wheel completely go, you couldn't leave the path …

This is the benefit of wisdom…

Though you may veer of the road at times, wisdom always keeps you on the right path and brings you back to center…

Verse 9 says that wisdom points out the right course…

In other words, Godly wisdom points out the way to go…

Wisdom doesn't cloud your judgment, it clears your judgment…

Verse 10 completes this thought with another benefit of wisdom…

10
For wisdom will enter your heart
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
11
Discretion will guard you,
Understanding will watch over you,

Do you know the greatest benefit of wisdom for you personally?

Wisdom is pleasant for your soul…

Look, we live in an unpleasant world…

Our health stresses us out…

Our finances stress us out…

Our relationships with people sometimes stress us out…

Our jobs stress us out…

Wisdom doesn't stress us…

It settles our soul…

If you are seeking and treasuring and holding on to wisdom, you find comfort in chaos…

Because godly wisdom reminds you that God is completely in control…

Godly wisdom reminds you that all things work together for good to those who love God…

Godly wisdom reminds you that trials one in your life to prove your faith and grow your trust in the Lord…

When the world is unpleasant around you, God's wisdom is pleasant to your soul…

How many times has godly wisdom been a comfort to me in the chaos of life?

Too many times to count…

When the world is unstable around you, wisdom calms the sea, stops the wind and settles your soul…

Now we have seen the call of wisdom and the benefits of wisdom, but we must look now at the temptations aways from wisdom….

Which begins in verse 12…

III. The Temptations Away from Wisdom (12-19)

And in verses 12-15, we meet the first hindrance to wisdom and this is the evil man…

Verse 12….

12
To deliver you from the way of evil,
From the man who speaks perverse things;
13
From those who leave the paths of uprightness
To walk in the ways of darkness;
14
Who delight in doing evil
And rejoice in the perversity of evil;
15
Whose paths are crooked,
And who are devious in their ways;

Wisdom calls, and wisdom has incredible benefits, so why doesn't everyone seek wisdom?

Well, there are a number of reasons but one of them is the temptation of the evil man..

And you can see the description of this evil man…

First of all, he speaks perverse things…

Let me tell you something…

You can tell an awful lot about a person by what they say…

Though I am careful to never let the words of a person be the final judge of their lives, I do pay attention to what they talk about…

And evil people simply talk about perverse things…

Which would include foul language, sexual comments, dirty jokes, racist comments, and words that speak of sinful things…

And a great temptation of evil people are their tempting words, which usually take the form of flattery at first…

We saw that last week as the words of the criminal often flatter you by inviting you to their group…

But not only are the words of the evil man perverse, so are their lives..

Verse 12 describes them as leaving the paths of uprightness and walking in darkness….

They even delight in doing evil things..

In other words, the evil man makes sin sound fun and even rejoices in the sin he commits..

So the first obstacle to seeking wisdom is the evil man who seeks to pull you into his evil ways…

The second obstacle is the adulterous woman…

Now remember, the context of proverbs is instruction to a son from his father…

So the first warning is seen as an evil man but it could take the form of an evil woman who tempts your daughter as well….

Likewise, verses 16-19 could be an adulterous man to your daughter…

But the picture here is painted of the seductive woman who lures the young man from the path of wisdom…

Look at verses 16-19…

16
To deliver you from the strange woman,
From the [b]adulteress who flatters with her words;
17
That leaves the companion of her youth
And forgets the covenant of her God;
18
For her house [c]sinks down to death
And her tracks lead to the [d]dead;

19
None who go to her return again,
Nor do they reach the paths of life.

It is no coincidence that the evil man and the evil woman begin their tempting with their words…

In this case, the words of the woman are not perverse in the beginning but flattering…

Adultery often begins with flattery…

From a woman to a man or vice versa….

But then it quickly moves from flattery to adultery as this woman forget her vows to her husband and to God and lures her victim farther away from wisdom….

And though the evil man wants you to join him on his crooked path, the evil woman wants you to come to her house…

But it is a house of death…

You may remember the commercial of long ago…

I actually looked it up, but in 1981 Black Flag has a commercial for what they called a Roach Motel…

And it was a little box that attracted roaches into it, but the floor was made of glue and they became trapped and would die…

And the commercial would end with….

“Black Flag Roach Motel….Roaches check in but they never check out..”

That is the general principle of those who give in to adultery…

They never leave the one who tempts them to adultery…

So, the reader of Proverbs is offered wisdom and told of the benefits of wisdom, but he is then warned of the ways that lead off the path of wisdom….

And finally, chapter 2 concludes with the ends of wisdom..

IV. The Ends of Wisdom (20-22)

Verse 20…

20
So you will walk in the way of good men
And keep to the paths of the righteous.
21
For the upright will [e]live in the land
And the blameless will remain in it;

Every time we hop in the car, John Andrew wants to know every detail of where we are going…

Not just when we will get there, but where we are headed..

What it looks like and who will be there….

And I am getting better at simply saying, "well, let's just let it be a surprise."

IF you think about it, that is the way it is with most decisions in life…

We usually don't know what the ultimate end of our decisions will be…

We may have an idea or guess, but we can't be confident due to an unstable world filled with unstable people..

Yet, God does not leave us in the dark or guessing about the decision to seek His wisdom or not…

In fact, in verse 20-22, he details the two possible outcomes for those who accept or reject the call of wisdom…

In verse 20, we get the best possible outcome first…

And this is the end result of the one who seeks seeks God's wisdom…

First off, those who choose God's wisdom live a life pleasing to the Lord..

They walk in the right paths and are upright people…

Verse 21 goes on to say that the chooser of wisdom will also live in the land…

This is directed at Israel who was given an earthly kingdom and the promise of wisdom is that it will lead to a place to lay your head at night in the Promised Land..

But it also applies to anyone today who picks the path of wisdom..

The path leads of wisdom eventually leads to the new heavens and the new earth….

Which is the ultimate Promised Land for all of God's people…

And then we get to verse 22, which is the worst end for all who reject wisdom…

22
But the wicked will be cut off from the land
And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.

The decision to reject wisdom…

The decision to ignore wisdom…

The decision to embrace anything over the wisdom of God is to choose a path that leads to destruction…

The wicked would include anyone rejecting godly wisdom…

And the end of the wicked is their acting out of the land…

They will be tossed from the land….

This is the sad ending for all who who reject the wisdom of God that he has made so readily available to anyone who would seek it…

Conclusion

Now what can we take home with us from Proverbs 2 tonight?

#1 - Listen, receive, treasure and seek the wisdom of God in the Word of God.

I will simply say this the only way I know to say it…

How long will you refuse to be a student of the Scriptures?

How long will you resist making the Bible part of your daily life?

How long will you be content with never digging into the Scriptures?

So many people today sit and wait on a word from God…

So many people today sit and wait on wisdom to fall out of heaven onto their lives..

Yes, God can offer additional wisdom, but why pass up the wisdom he has already provided?

This is like the kid who has been given a plate that is filled with good food, but he still wants to eat off your plate…

What do we tell him?

That's ridiculous…

Eat the food I had given you…

The same could be said for people who pass up Bible study but beg God for wisdom…

Most of the time, the wisdom they need is already of the plate that God has given to them in His Word…

#2 - Resist the evil man and evil woman.

God put the evil man and evil woman in Proverbs 2 for a reason…

Because they are the major obstacles to seeking wisdom in our lives…

And let me offer two thoughts here…

First, evil people don't come to you dressed in all black and wearing a shirt with the devil on it…

Simply be aware of anyone who would leave you off the path of wisdom…

Including family and friends…

Second, never forget that you are ultimately responsible for your rejection of wisdom….

Though there are temptations away from the Lord and his wisdom, we are responsible for rejecting wisdom…

When a person faces the Lord, he won't be able to blame his decision for rejecting wisdom on anyone else but himself…

Yet, we are called to resist evil people who pull us away from the path of wisdom…

Finally #3…

#3 - To reject wisdom is to reject Christ.

It is not possible to be a Christian and reject the path of wisdom…

The Bible is crystal clear…

People who claim to be Christians walk a path of righteousness…

You can't reject the wisdom of God and claim to know Christ…

You can't practice a life of sin and claim to be saved…

To know Christ is to know wisdom…

To know Christ is to practice wisdom..

To reject wisdom is to reject Christ…

To practice evil is to reject Christ..

I am shocked by how many people in 2017 claim to be a Christian but live and support lifestyles of sin…

There are people who go to church and arrogantly claim to love Christ but reject the wisdom of the Bible…

That is impossible…

Christ is the wisdom of God…

To know Him is to know wisdom…

To know Him is to practice wisdom…

To reject wisdom is to reject Christ…

To ignore wisdom is to ignore Christ…

Let us pray.