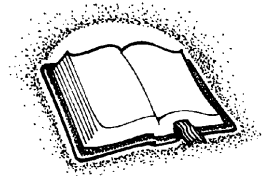


Unlocking the Bible (27)



Come to Think of It!

Reflections on the Books of Proverbs

The three books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs - all attributed to Solomon - complete this section on Books of Experience. Following on from the first two books – Job and Psalms - they take the learning from experience a stage further. Job and Psalms are caught up in the experience(s) of life with all the perplexing questions and overwhelming confusion that arises from them. In contrast, the circumstance for these three books is different. Thanks to David's legacy, life for Solomon was much easier. Solomon's was a peacetime existence. That gave him time to reflect and to think. And it is that reflection – the distillation of the truth – that characterizes these three books.

Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs is the longest book of the three 'wisdom' books. It is a collection of proverbs, most of them from Solomon, They are pithy sayings which capture the essence of truth and express it in a graphic way. Looking at the book as a whole, it seems to have two emphases.

The first deals with a **principle**. In chapters 1 to 9, Wisdom is highlighted - its virtue, value and importance. It is something to be sought after and, when found, to be received gladly and embraced wholeheartedly. It is a secret passed down from elder to younger, from father to son, from teacher to disciple to be adopted into one's life to influence behaviour.

At the same time there is a warning against the allurements of plausible – but foolish - alternative sources, epitomised as the seduction of a prostitute.

Such strong exhortations echo the emphasis of the Psalmist who says: *Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against You* or *Your Word is a Lamp unto my feet and alight to my path*.

The remaining chapters, 10 – 31 having established the essential act of accepting wisdom as the guiding principle, then go on to elaborate on **practice**. The emphasis now is on working out in practice what has been taken in in principle. That outworking has several features and aspects.

In the first place such outworking makes a difference. There is clear distinction between the actions and attitudes of the righteous and those of the wicked. Such a difference is the direct result of following – or not following – wisdom.

Secondly, the outworking applies to the ordinary functions of life as it is lived on earth and among people. The examples quoted in Proverbs refer to such commonplace things as: just weights, commerce, workmanship, talking, respect for others and their property, showing consideration, treating others fairly, being disciplined and independent, not being lazy and slothful, refusing to give in to enticements, raising children, exercising discipline and self control when invited to meals, not succumbing to inducements towards the wrong. And so on. The behaviour in these actions is governed by the wisdom adopted. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God. Because of respect for

God and regard for His desires, then the behaviour of the wise is bound to reflect that right(eous)ness.

That is reminiscent of the NT teaching on Christian behaviour. Not only does the Lord Jesus say: *'Let your lights so shine'* and *'the least of these things'* but the Epistles echo that with: *'if you are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above'*, and *'walk worthy of your calling'* and *'work out of your own salvation with fear and trembling'*. It is extremely practical. It echoes James' emphasis on faith and works.